

**Exploring the effectiveness of multimodal texts in enhancing engagement
and literacy skills in ESL classrooms**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of multimodal texts in boosting engagement and literacy skills in ESL classrooms. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, fifteen Bachelor of Secondary Education English major students at Isabela State University-Ilagan Campus were interviewed to share their lived experiences with integrating multimodal resources, including visual, digital, and media texts. Results showed that multimodal texts promote creativity, enhance speaking skills, and improve digital literacy by offering authentic opportunities for communication and collaboration. However, some limitations were observed, including limited verbal interaction, accessibility challenges, technical issues, and risks associated with passive learning. These findings emphasize the importance of using multimodal strategies carefully and critically, combining traditional methods with innovative practices to maximize student learning. The study suggests providing training for educators, improving access to technology, and offering guidance for evaluating digital resources to increase instructional effectiveness. Overall, multimodal texts enrich language learning but need thoughtful implementation.

Keywords: multimodal texts, engagement, literacy skills, speaking skills, digital literacy

Date Submitted: November 14, 2025

Date Accepted: November 27, 2025

Date Published: December 23, 2025

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DOI: <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404663>

Recommended citation:

Tan, F. C., Dela Raga, R. M. P., & Costales, R. R. (2025). Exploring the effectiveness of multimodal texts in enhancing engagement and literacy skills in ESL classrooms. *Pantao (The International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)* 4 (4), 7263-7272. <http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS0404663>

INTRODUCTION

It cannot be denied that technology has emerged as an indispensable tool across diverse domains, simplifying tasks and addressing human needs. Notably, in education, technology plays a pivotal role in catering to diverse learning styles and meeting the varied needs of students. By enhancing engagement and literacy skills, technology integration aligns traditional teaching methods with the dynamic demands of modern society.

Traditional literacy has been the foundation for education, serving as the backbone for students' communication and literacy skills. Traditionally, teachers play an important role in delivering their content through lectures and giving written assignments that primarily focus on enhancing students' literacy skills, such as reading and writing skills through printed text in English teaching. That is to say, it is a teacher-centered approach, a traditional method of teaching in which the teacher serves as the primary source of information, imparting knowledge to students who are expected to accept it passively. However, while this approach is effective in cultivating essential literacy skills, its effectiveness is challenged in this modern age as it limits its ability to meet students' learning styles and diverse needs. Hence, educators make an effort to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences for their students to cater to their students' learning styles and diverse needs in this fast-changing world.

Today, more than ever before, attention is being given to the role of multimodal texts as they relate to practice in English language arts classrooms and operate within 21st-century literacies. This attention is significant and timely, as it reflects a growing shift in how literacy is defined and what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century. Literacy, no longer confined to communication through reading and writing of traditional printed text, has expanded and figuratively exploded, particularly within the past decade (Sanders & Albers, 2010, p. 1).

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of multimodal texts in English teaching practices. Multimodal text is a type of text that considers linguistic and visual choices to meet the purpose of the text, audience, and context, and how those choices work together in the organization and development of information and ideas (Gourlay, 2016). This approach acknowledges that communication in the 21st century extends beyond traditional text-based forms and embraces the diverse ways in which individuals engage with information and express themselves (Araújo, 2021; Bonsignori, 2022; Huang, 2019; Schöninger, 2020)

Moreover, multimodal texts, with their emphasis on diverse modes of communication, foster the development of speaking skills and digital literacy, which are indispensable competencies in today's interconnected and technologically driven world (Capone, 2018; Kao, 2022; Wang, 2019). With this, teachers can effectively create dynamic learning environments that meet the diverse needs and preferences of their students. For instance, while incorporating visual aids, such as charts, diagrams, and images, helps to enhance understanding and engagement among students in the classroom, utilizing technology, such as educational apps, online resources, and multimedia presentations, also allows students to explore in creative and interactive ways (Djoko Sutrisno et al., 2023).

The aforementioned studies have tended to focus on the benefits and advantages of multimodal texts in English teaching. However, there is a limited understanding of how effectively these multimodal approaches enhance student engagement and literacy compared to traditional methods. Hence, this research sought to explore the effectiveness of multimodal texts on student engagement and literacy skills, specifically speaking and digital literacy skills, in English

classrooms among students of the Bachelor of Secondary Education program majoring in English at Isabela State University-Ilagan Campus.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to explore how the incorporation of multimodal texts in English classrooms enhances students' engagement and literacy skills through the use of visual, digital, and media texts among Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English at Isabela State University-Ilagan Campus. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, and school year level enrolled?
2. What are the lived experiences of the respondents in using multimodal texts in ESL classrooms with respect to their speaking skills and digital literacy, particularly in terms of perceived benefits and advantages as well as limitations and challenges?

METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed a qualitative approach. Phenomenological research aimed to describe what all participants had in common as they experienced the phenomenon, reducing individual experiences to a universal essence. As noted by Creswell and Creswell (2017), phenomenology seeks a grasp of the very nature of the thing, returning to the concrete, captured by the phrase "back to the things themselves." Specifically, the study employed psychological phenomenology, focusing on participants' experiences rather than the researchers' interpretations.

The procedures involved identifying the phenomenon, collecting data from participants, and analyzing it through horizontalization and theme clustering to derive significant statements and themes. The descriptions were synthesized and validated with participants to ensure the study's credibility and reliability (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

Data were primarily sourced from fifteen (15) Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English at Isabela State University, Ilagan Campus. Polkinghorn in Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended participants of not less than five (5) but not more than fifteen (15) individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. The interview questionnaire was administered before the interview protocol process to gauge participants' initial perceptions and attitudes toward the subject matter. The open-ended interview protocol, with necessary probing and follow-ups, was given to the participants and allowed them to decide on giving responses that were significant to the purpose of the study. Secondary sources of data were books, journals, articles, and other reference materials.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) explain that in a phenomenological study, the participants must have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences. Utilizing convenience sampling, the researchers included fifteen (15) Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English at Isabela State University - Ilagan Campus in the City of Ilagan, Isabela, whom the researchers firmly believed had experienced the challenges of integrating multimodal texts in English classrooms; understanding the research problem and central phenomenon, and could provide the much-needed data for the study at hand. As deemed

necessary, reserved and backup potential participants were maintained to support any unexpected and substantial withdrawal of chosen participants.

The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with fifteen (15) participants using a researcher-made interview protocol aligned with Moustakas' guidelines, as discussed in Creswell and Creswell (2017). This protocol underwent validation and approval by a panel of qualitative research experts, including the dissertation adviser and research consultant.

The researchers presented the interview questionnaire to the participants via a private and secured electronic mail platform and retrieved and transcribed responses. Ratislavova and Ratislav (2014) highlighted that in an e-mail interview, participants can take time to be more thoughtful and careful in their responses on critical and sensitive issues than they would during face-to-face interviews, and the nature and quality of response are often denser, more structured, and more explicit. It also facilitates the exploration of busy participants' reflections on their experiences at a time and space convenient to them (Mason and Ide, 2014). Since electronic mail interviews are asynchronous, discussion, coordination, and gathering of information can be simultaneously conducted with more than one participant from different geographical locations without additional expenses on travel costs and travel time (Hawkins, 2018).

To ensure a rigorous and ethically sound study, the researchers first obtained ethical approval and informed consent from participants, and a letter of endorsement from the Dean of the Bachelor of Education at Isabela State University - Ilagan Campus was obtained to facilitate access and rapport with participants.

Convenience sampling was employed to recruit a diverse range of participants, meeting the study's inclusion criteria. Five (5) students from each level—sophomore, junior, and senior—a total of fifteen (15) students were selected based on their accessibility and availability to the researchers. The interview protocol, designed to elicit in-depth responses on critical and sensitive issues, was securely distributed via email, allowing for thoughtful responses at participants' convenience. To ensure trustworthiness, participants confirmed the transcribed interpretations.

The researchers strictly considered formal stages of communication for ethical consideration. They first informed the Dean of the Bachelor of Secondary Education at Isabela State University - Ilagan Campus about their purpose in conducting the study. Second, they established their connection with the participants through the Letter of Introduction (Appendix A) and the Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix B), which provided detailed information about the research and ensured that participants fully understood what participation would entail.

The consent form shall contain the central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in the data collection; the right of the participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any point in time; comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents; a statement about known risks associated with the participation of the study; the expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study, and; the signature of the participants as well as the researchers. (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

The researchers followed the steps in a phenomenological study, which consisted of identifying the phenomenon of the study, setting aside the researchers' experiences, and collecting data from fifteen (15) students of the Bachelor of Secondary Education majoring in English. Moreover, they analyzed the data by reducing the information into significant statements or quotes and then combining them into themes. Theme clustering includes descriptions of what the participants experienced in the integration of multimodal literacies in English classrooms (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the data gathered from fifteen participants using a qualitative descriptive design. The respondents were selected through convenience sampling and consisted of Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English at Isabela State University Ilagan Campus. Data were collected through in-depth interviews that explored the participants' lived experiences in using multimodal texts in English as a Second Language classrooms, with particular emphasis on speaking skills and digital literacy. The analysis followed a thematic approach, allowing patterns and meanings to emerge directly from the participants' narratives. The discussion of results is anchored on the objectives of the study and is interpreted in relation to existing literature on multimodal learning, language development, and digital literacy.

The demographic profile of the participants provides essential context for understanding the reported experiences. The study involved fifteen students, with five respondents drawn from each academic level namely sophomore, junior, and senior. The sophomore group consisted entirely of female students aged nineteen to twenty. The junior group included two male and three female students aged twenty to twenty-one. The senior group was composed of five female students aged twenty to twenty-two. The predominance of female respondents and the representation across year levels reflect the composition of the English major cohort in the institution and offer insight into how multimodal texts are experienced by students at varying stages of teacher preparation. The distribution suggests that participants possessed sufficient academic exposure to English pedagogy and digital tools, enabling them to articulate informed reflections on multimodal practices in ESL classrooms.

Engagement and creativity with visual, digital, and media texts emerged as a dominant theme in the participants' accounts. Students consistently described visual texts such as posters, infographics, photographs, and diagrams as tools that increased classroom engagement and fostered creativity. Posters were viewed as effective in capturing attention and making presentations more engaging, while infographics were valued for their ability to present information clearly and memorably, thereby enhancing digital creativity. Photographs supported storytelling and audience engagement, and diagrams enabled concise representation of information across digital platforms such as presentation software and document editors. These experiences indicate that visual modes supported active participation and creative expression, aligning with findings that multimodal tasks promote enjoyment, collaboration, and motivation in language learning contexts. The integration of digital texts further expanded these benefits. Interactive documents, websites, and online reading materials were described as facilitating real time discussions, peer feedback, and interactive reading experiences that contributed to comprehension, creativity, and critical thinking. These observations support previous studies that associate interactive digital texts with increased attention, motivation, and academic engagement.

Media texts also played a role in sustaining learner motivation. Podcasts and educational videos were highlighted as engaging resources that encouraged attentive listening and sustained interest during lessons. Participants noted that such media supported focus and made learning experiences more dynamic. These findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the motivational and affective benefits of video-based instruction in language classrooms, particularly in enhancing confidence and positive learning attitudes.

The role of digital texts in improving speaking skills was strongly articulated by the respondents. E books, websites, blogs, and online resources were perceived as valuable sources of vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and fluency. Participants explained that reading digital texts aloud helped them practice articulation and pronunciation, while written expression in blogs and online platforms supported organized thinking that translated into clearer oral communication. Exposure to well-structured sentences and diverse topics through websites enabled learners to practice expressing opinions and engaging in discussions across contexts. Multimedia content such as tutorial videos further enhanced speaking skills by allowing learners to imitate authentic speech models. These experiences reinforce earlier research indicating that digital texts and e learning tools support oral language development through exposure, practice, and contextualized language use.

Digital literacy enhancement through digital texts constituted another major finding. Participants reported that engaging with platforms such as blogging tools, document editors, and presentation software improved their ability to navigate digital environments, organize information, and utilize features such as formatting, highlighting, and note taking. Interactive documents and online presentations were particularly noted for developing skills in editing, customization, and real time collaboration, while websites and blogs facilitated access to current information and strengthened information seeking skills. These findings align with perspectives that emphasize multimodal composition as a means of cultivating critical digital literacy, enabling learners to analyze, evaluate, and create content across multiple modes of communication.

Media texts also contributed significantly to the development of speaking skills. Podcasts, news reports, interviews, social media videos, films, documentaries, music videos, and slideshows provided authentic models of language use and real-world communication contexts. Participants emphasized that podcasts and interviews helped them understand clear speech patterns and encouraged them to articulate thoughts and perspectives effectively. Movie clips and documentaries supported vocabulary expansion, pronunciation practice, and expressive fluency through reenactment and imitation of dialogues. Music videos contributed to everyday vocabulary use, while slideshows supported concise and impactful oral delivery. These findings corroborate studies demonstrating that exposure to authentic media enhances pronunciation, fluency, and communicative competence in language learners.

In addition to speaking skills, media texts were perceived as instrumental in strengthening digital literacy. Respondents reported that engagement with social media platforms, audio and video production tools, and presentation software enhanced their ability to access, analyze, and create digital content. Skills related to multimedia integration, transitions, animations, and content sharing were frequently mentioned. These experiences reflect the growing importance of digital literacy in education and support arguments that technology mediated learning environments prepare students for academic and professional communication demands.

Despite these benefits, the participants identified several limitations associated with the use of multimodal texts. One prominent concern was the restriction of verbal interaction. Visual texts such as posters, charts, and infographics were perceived to simplify information to the extent that opportunities for detailed discussion and spontaneous speaking were reduced. Similarly, digital texts such as e books, websites, presentations, and podcasts were often associated with individual reading or listening activities that limited collaborative dialogue and oral practice. Over reliance on prerecorded content was seen to diminish real time interaction and immediate feedback, which are essential for developing spontaneous speaking skills. These findings resonate with research

suggesting that technology exposure alone does not guarantee meaningful verbal interaction and may, in some cases, constrain oral language development.

Limitations in enhancing digital literacy were also noted. Participants expressed that certain visual tools did not support the development of advanced digital skills required for creating complex multimedia outputs. Infographics, for instance, were viewed as insufficient for cultivating competencies in interactive lesson design or multimedia production. Additionally, social media was perceived as potentially distracting, contributing to procrastination rather than deep digital engagement. The complexity and lack of user friendliness of some digital platforms were identified as barriers, particularly for learners with limited technical skills. These challenges underscore the need for guided instruction and scaffolding in digital multimodal composing.

Accessibility and credibility issues further complicated the integration of multimodal texts. Respondents reported limited access to devices, internet connectivity, subscription-based resources, and advanced software, highlighting the persistence of the digital divide. Cultural bias in media content and surface level information in visual texts was also cited as constraints. Moreover, concerns about misinformation, outdated content, and unreliable online sources were frequently raised. Participants acknowledged difficulty in discerning credible information, particularly on websites, blogs, social media, and digital documents. These findings align with scholarship emphasizing the multimodal nature of misinformation and the challenges individuals face in critically evaluating digital content in information saturated environments.

Another recurring concern was the tendency toward passive consumption of multimodal texts. Participants noted that poorly designed posters, infographics, and documentaries often encouraged silent viewing rather than active discussion. Over reliance on visuals and media was seen to reduce spontaneous speaking and meaningful interaction, particularly when activities lacked guided engagement. This pattern supports existing evidence that passive media consumption can limit opportunities for active communication and language development.

Technical challenges further constrained the effective use of multimodal texts. Participants described issues related to device compatibility, navigation difficulties, software errors, and steep learning curves associated with video production and interactive tools. Such technical barriers disrupted learning experiences and required advanced troubleshooting skills, potentially hindering both speaking practice and digital literacy development.

Taken together, the findings reveal a complex picture of multimodal text integration in ESL classrooms. The participants' lived experiences demonstrate that multimodal texts enhance engagement, creativity, speaking skills, and digital literacy when thoughtfully integrated and supported by interactive pedagogical practices. Visual, digital, and media texts provide diverse pathways for authentic language use, critical thinking, and technological competence. However, the results also highlight significant limitations related to reduced verbal interaction, passive consumption, accessibility constraints, credibility concerns, and technical challenges. These findings underscore the importance of balanced instructional approaches that combine multimodal resources with opportunities for active dialogue, guided practice, and critical evaluation. The results address the objectives of the study by illuminating both the pedagogical potential and the challenges of multimodal texts, thereby providing a foundation for informed instructional decision making and future research in ESL education.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of multimodal texts in ESL classrooms plays a significant role in enhancing student engagement, speaking skills, and digital literacy among Bachelor of Secondary Education students majoring in English. Visual, digital, and media texts were found to foster creativity and active participation by transforming lessons into more interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Through exposure to diverse modes of communication, students were able to practice oral expression, expand vocabulary, refine pronunciation, and develop confidence in speaking across academic and informal contexts. At the same time, consistent engagement with digital platforms enabled learners to acquire essential digital literacy skills, including navigating online environments, organizing and presenting information, and critically engaging with digital content. These outcomes affirm the pedagogical value of multimodal texts in supporting both linguistic and technological competencies that are increasingly essential in contemporary education.

Despite these positive contributions, the study also revealed notable challenges that accompany the use of multimodal texts. Participants reported that excessive reliance on visual and digital materials may limit opportunities for spontaneous verbal interaction and meaningful face-to-face communication, thereby constraining the development of speaking skills when not carefully managed. Issues related to accessibility, including limited access to devices, internet connectivity, and advanced digital tools, highlighted the persistence of the digital divide and its implications for equitable learning opportunities. Concerns regarding the credibility and reliability of online information further underscored the need for guided instruction in evaluating digital sources. Additionally, tendencies toward passive consumption of content and technical difficulties such as platform complexity, software incompatibility, and navigation challenges were identified as factors that can hinder effective learning and skill development.

In light of these findings, the study emphasizes the importance of a balanced and intentional approach to multimodal instruction. Multimodal texts should be integrated alongside traditional teaching strategies to ensure that students continue to engage in active verbal interaction while benefiting from diverse digital resources. Collaborative learning activities that promote discussion, peer interaction, and group tasks are essential in preventing passive engagement and strengthening both speaking and digital literacy skills. Furthermore, sustained professional development for educators is necessary to support the effective selection, design, and implementation of multimodal materials that align with instructional goals and learner needs. Addressing technical challenges and reducing disparities in access through institutional support and infrastructure development are equally critical to maximizing the benefits of digital learning environments.

The study also underscores the need for explicit instruction in critical digital literacy. Guiding students to assess the credibility, accuracy, and potential bias of online resources is vital in fostering responsible digital citizenship and informed participation in digital spaces. By equipping learners with the skills to evaluate information critically and use technology ethically, educators can enhance the educational impact of multimodal texts while mitigating associated risks. Finally, the findings point to opportunities for future research to further examine the effects of specific multimodal tools on distinct aspects of language development and to explore their application across varied educational contexts. Overall, the study concludes that when thoughtfully implemented, multimodal texts hold substantial potential to enrich ESL instruction, support holistic language development, and prepare learners for the communicative and digital demands of modern academic and professional environments.

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