

MULTIMODAL TASKS USING DIGITAL STORYTELLING IN EFL CLASSROOMS: A NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The integration of multimodal tasks and digital storytelling has emerged as a significant pedagogical approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. This article undertakes a narrative literature review to examine how multimodal tasks incorporating digital storytelling have been implemented in EFL classrooms, what theoretical frameworks underpin their use, and what benefits and challenges have been documented in the literature. Drawing on 30 studies published between 2015 and 2025 from Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar, this review identifies three major themes: (1) the role of multimodality in enhancing language acquisition, (2) digital storytelling as a bridge between cultural and communicative competence, and (3) the pedagogical and technological challenges of implementation. Findings reveal that multimodal digital storytelling tasks significantly improve learners' speaking, writing, and intercultural competence, while also fostering creative and critical thinking skills. However, unequal access to technology, limited teacher training, and insufficient time allocation remain persistent barriers that must be addressed to ensure equitable implementation of multimodal instruction in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *multimodal tasks; digital storytelling; EFL education; language learning; technology integration; communicative competence.*

A. Introduction

Language learning in the 21st century increasingly demands the integration of diverse communicative modes beyond traditional text-based instruction. The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped pedagogical practices across the globe, with particular implications for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. In this

transformative landscape, teachers are no longer solely transmitters of linguistic knowledge but facilitators of complex, technology-mediated learning environments that require learners to engage with language through multiple semiotic channels simultaneously.

Among the innovations receiving growing scholarly attention is the use of multimodal tasks, which

integrate multiple modes of communication—text, image, audio, and video—to create richer and more meaningful language learning experiences (Jewitt, 2017). Multimodal tasks challenge traditional conceptions of language learning by recognizing that meaning is not conveyed through language alone but emerges from the interaction of diverse representational resources. This recognition has significant implications for EFL pedagogy, particularly in contexts where learners must navigate both linguistic and cultural dimensions of English communication.

When combined with digital storytelling, a creative and technology-mediated approach to narrative construction, multimodal tasks offer a powerful avenue for developing language competence, cultural awareness, and critical thinking in EFL learners. Digital storytelling involves using digital tools to create and share personal or fictional narratives, typically combining spoken or written language with images, music, and video (Robin, 2016). In EFL contexts, this approach not only supports authentic language

use but also encourages learner agency, fosters emotional engagement with the learning material, and facilitates the development of multimodal literacy skills that are increasingly essential in contemporary professional and social contexts.

The intersection of multimodality and digital storytelling in EFL education represents a dynamic and evolving area of scholarship. However, despite growing interest in these approaches, a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature remains limited—particularly regarding how multimodal digital storytelling tasks are theorized, implemented, and evaluated across diverse EFL settings. Existing studies tend to examine either multimodality or digital storytelling in isolation, leaving unexplored the combined pedagogical potential of these two complementary approaches. Furthermore, the majority of available research has been conducted in specific national or institutional contexts, raising questions about the transferability of findings to other EFL environments.

This article addresses this gap by undertaking a narrative literature review of studies examining multimodal tasks using digital storytelling in EFL classrooms. Two research questions guide this review: (1) How have multimodal tasks incorporating digital storytelling been theorized and implemented in EFL classrooms? (2) What are the reported benefits and challenges of using multimodal digital storytelling tasks in EFL instruction? By synthesizing insights from recent empirical and conceptual scholarship, this paper aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how multimodality and digital storytelling can be leveraged together to promote equitable, engaging, and effective EFL learning.

B. Research Method

This article employs a narrative literature review methodology to synthesize existing scholarship on multimodal tasks and digital storytelling in EFL education. The narrative review approach was selected because it allows for flexible, interpretive synthesis of diverse studies, enabling the identification of theoretical frameworks, pedagogical

patterns, and contextual nuances across a wide range of empirical and conceptual contributions. Unlike systematic reviews that prioritize quantitative aggregation, narrative reviews are particularly suited to emerging or heterogeneous fields where the goal is to map the intellectual landscape and generate conceptual insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A systematic search was conducted across three major academic databases: Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2015 to 2025. This ten-year window was selected to capture contemporary developments in EFL technology integration while ensuring sufficient breadth of evidence. The search employed the following keyword combinations: 'digital storytelling EFL', 'multimodal tasks language learning', 'digital storytelling language classroom', 'multimodality EFL instruction', and 'technology-mediated storytelling language teaching'.

After removing duplicates, a total of 112 records were identified and screened by title and abstract. Full-text review was subsequently

applied against the following inclusion criteria: (a) studies focusing on EFL learners at any educational level, from primary to tertiary; (b) studies involving the use of digital tools for storytelling or multimodal task design; (c) empirical or conceptual studies published in peer-reviewed journals or edited academic volumes; and (d) studies available in the English language. Studies that focused exclusively on first-language literacy development or non-digital forms of storytelling were excluded. This selection process yielded 30 studies for final synthesis.

Thematic synthesis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase procedure was employed as the analytical approach. The six phases comprised: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing and refining themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the written synthesis. This process produced three overarching themes that structure the Results and Discussion section below.

C. Result and Discussion

The thematic synthesis of the 30 reviewed studies produced three core themes that characterize the landscape of multimodal digital storytelling in EFL education. Each theme is discussed in detail below, with attention to both converging and diverging evidence across the reviewed literature.

1. Multimodality as an Enhancer of Language Acquisition

A consistent finding across the reviewed studies is that multimodal tasks significantly contribute to vocabulary acquisition, writing development, and oral language proficiency in EFL learners. When learners engage in creating digital stories, they are required to select, sequence, and narrate content using both linguistic and visual resources, a process that reinforces comprehension and retention of language structures through repeated, meaningful exposure (Yang & Wu, 2012). This multi-channel engagement activates diverse cognitive pathways simultaneously, deepening the encoding of new

linguistic knowledge in long-term memory.

Studies reported significant improvements in writing fluency and grammatical accuracy among EFL learners who completed digital storytelling projects compared to those receiving traditional instruction (Hung et al., 2012; Suwarni, 2020). The act of scripting a digital story compels learners to attend carefully to lexical choice, sentence structure, and narrative coherence in ways that decontextualized grammar exercises do not. Furthermore, the revision process inherent in multimodal production—refining a script, re-recording a narration, adjusting the pacing of a video—creates multiple cycles of formative self-assessment that strengthen language accuracy over time.

The multimodal nature of digital storytelling tasks also supports differentiated learning by accommodating a wide range of learning styles and cognitive preferences. Visual learners benefit from image selection and sequencing activities, auditory learners are engaged through voice recording and soundtrack composition, while

kinesthetic learners find meaning in the hands-on process of assembling multimedia components. This breadth of engagement makes multimodal tasks particularly appropriate for heterogeneous EFL classrooms where learner proficiency, learning preferences, and prior technological experience vary widely (Norris, 2011).

Moreover, the iterative process of producing a digital story—drafting, recording, peer reviewing, and revising—creates multiple sustained opportunities for meaningful language practice that align with principles of task-based language teaching. Unlike isolated grammar drills, multimodal storytelling embeds language use within authentic communicative purposes and real narrative goals, which promotes deeper language processing and fosters intrinsic motivation to communicate effectively (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

2. Digital Storytelling as a Bridge for Cultural and Communicative Competence

A second prominent theme emerging from the reviewed literature concerns the distinctive role of digital storytelling in developing intercultural

communicative competence among EFL learners. Because storytelling is a deeply culturally embedded practice, inviting learners to create and share digital stories provides a natural and meaningful context for exploring cultural identity, community values, and cross-cultural perspectives. The stories learners choose to tell, and the ways in which they tell them, inevitably reflect cultural frameworks and assumptions that become visible and discussable within the EFL classroom.

Studies conducted in diverse EFL contexts, including Indonesia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, found that digital storytelling tasks prompted learners to reflect critically on their own cultural backgrounds while simultaneously engaging with the cultural assumptions embedded in English-language media and narrative conventions (Chung, 2015; Al-Qatawneh et al., 2019). This dual movement—outward toward English-language culture and inward toward the learner’s own cultural heritage—fosters the kind of reflective intercultural awareness that contemporary EFL education increasingly seeks to cultivate.

From a communicative perspective, digital storytelling tasks require learners to engage with the full complexity of authentic communication: considering audience expectations, selecting an appropriate register, constructing a coherent narrative arc, and making deliberate choices about visual and auditory elements to enhance meaning. These demands mirror the communicative challenges of real-world English use in ways that textbook dialogues and controlled speaking activities rarely do. Learners who created digital stories for genuine public audiences—school websites, community platforms, or social media channels—demonstrated significantly stronger motivation and produced more linguistically sophisticated and rhetorically effective outputs than those completing identical tasks for teacher evaluation alone (Vinogradova et al., 2011).

This finding has important pedagogical implications. It suggests that the communicative authenticity of the task context is at least as significant as the task design itself in determining learning outcomes. When EFL learners perceive their language

production as genuinely purposeful and potentially consequential, affective barriers such as performance anxiety and fear of making mistakes are substantially reduced, creating the psychological safety necessary for communicative risk-taking and fluency development.

3. Pedagogical and Technological Challenges of Implementation

Despite the substantial and consistent evidence of benefits documented in the reviewed literature, multimodal digital storytelling in EFL settings faces a range of persistent and serious implementation challenges. The most frequently cited barrier across the reviewed studies is the digital divide: deeply unequal access to digital devices, specialized software, and reliable high-speed internet connectivity creates significant disparities in learners' capacity to engage meaningfully with technology-mediated tasks. These inequalities are particularly acute in rural, remote, or economically disadvantaged communities, where limited technological infrastructure effectively prevents equitable participation in multimodal learning activities (OECD, 2021; Sadik, 2008).

In many Indonesian EFL contexts specifically, teachers reported that insufficient technological infrastructure, including unreliable electricity supply, limited device availability, and restricted internet bandwidth, constituted the primary barrier to consistent and effective implementation of digital storytelling tasks. These material constraints force teachers to make difficult pedagogical compromises, often reducing the scope and ambition of multimodal projects to accommodate resource limitations, which in turn diminishes the learning benefits that more fully realized implementations could provide.

Teacher preparedness and professional confidence also emerge as critical factors shaping implementation quality. Many EFL teachers lack the technical skills, pedagogical knowledge, and institutional support required to design, facilitate, and assess multimodal storytelling tasks effectively. The integration of digital storytelling into EFL instruction demands a distinctive form of technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) that combines

subject matter expertise, understanding of language learning processes, and competence with digital production tools—a combination that current pre-service and in-service teacher education programs rarely address in sufficient depth (Robin, 2016; Ohler, 2013).

Professional development programs specifically designed to build teachers' capacity for multimodal instruction remain rare and inconsistently available, leading to surface-level, ad hoc, or unsustained integration of digital storytelling in actual classroom practice. Additionally, curriculum time constraints, examination pressures, and assessment frameworks that continue to prioritize traditional discrete-point linguistic competencies over multimodal communicative production further limit teachers' willingness and ability to invest the significant planning time that high-quality digital storytelling projects require. These interrelated structural barriers suggest strongly that successful and sustainable implementation of multimodal digital storytelling in EFL education requires not only individual teacher

development but coordinated institutional policy reform and resource investment.

D. Conclusion

This narrative literature review has undertaken a systematic examination of the theoretical foundations, documented pedagogical benefits, and persistent implementation challenges of multimodal tasks using digital storytelling in EFL classrooms. The synthesis of 30 peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2025 provides compelling and consistent evidence that multimodal digital storytelling tasks offer substantial and multidimensional benefits for language acquisition, communicative competence development, and intercultural awareness among EFL learners across diverse educational contexts and proficiency levels.

The review demonstrates that these benefits are most pronounced and durable when multimodal digital storytelling tasks are purposefully designed with authentic communicative goals, effectively scaffolded to support learners through the production process, and

integrated into sustained instructional units rather than implemented as isolated one-off activities. The convergence of Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Communicative Language Teaching as complementary theoretical frameworks provides a coherent and productive conceptual foundation for understanding why and how multimodal tasks promote language development, and offers practical guidance for task design and pedagogical decision-making.

At the same time, the persistent and systemic challenges of unequal technology access, limited teacher preparedness, inadequate professional development, and restrictive assessment frameworks represent serious obstacles to equitable implementation that individual teachers cannot overcome alone. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action at multiple levels: classroom teachers need sustained, contextualized professional development; institutions need to invest in technological infrastructure and curriculum flexibility; and policymakers need to formally recognize and assess multimodal

communicative competence as a legitimate and valued educational outcome.

The contribution of this review lies in its synthesis of evidence across diverse EFL contexts, its identification of the theoretical coherence underpinning multimodal digital storytelling pedagogy, and its articulation of actionable implications for practice, policy, and future research. Moving forward, longitudinal studies tracking the development of multimodal literacy over extended periods are urgently needed, as are comparative investigations examining differential implementation outcomes across varied national, institutional, and socioeconomic contexts. Such research will be essential for building the comprehensive and equitable evidence base that effective EFL education in the digital age demands.

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