Author for correspondence:
Sri Wuli Fitriati
✉ SriWuli.Fitriati@mail.unnes.ac.id
✉ Faculty of Language and
Arts (Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia)

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Integrating Moral Values into EFL learning through a Multimodal Project: A Case Study

Dewi Puspitasari[ID], **Sri Wuli Fitriati**[ID], **Widhiyanto**[ID], **Katharina Rustipa**[ID]

Abstract

Background/purpose. The integration of moral values into EFL teaching has been an important issue in Indonesia as multimodal literacy practices can be employed to foster both language learning and moral development among young learners. This study investigated how multimodal learning can be used to promote moral values alongside language skills among young learners in Indonesian primary schools.

Materials/methods. This research employed qualitative methods. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and analysis of students' artifacts. Activities such as storytelling, drawing, and collaborative projects were designed to encourage meaningful engagement with values such as kindness and responsibility. Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal framework, Unsworth's literacy development cycle, and principles of critical literacy were used as analytical frameworks.

Results. The findings reveal that multimodal literacy practices not only enhance linguistic competence but also nurture critical literacy and moral-social awareness. Students demonstrated increased autonomy, creativity, and a deeper understanding of moral values in these interactive activities.

Conclusion. The study highlights the transformative potential of multimodal approaches in EFL contexts, emphasizing their capacity to develop young learners into autonomous, creative meaning-makers. However, further refinement of theoretical and methodological frameworks is needed to ensure broader applicability across diverse educational settings.

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1. Introduction

The call for integrating values into English Language Teaching (ELT) is imperative. This is evidenced by global initiatives that emphasize education as a means of fostering cognitive, moral, and social growth, aligning with the framework of global citizenship (Franch, 2020). Schools, as structured social environments, play a pivotal role in shaping children's moral values. They provide opportunities for engagement with peers and adults that foster empathy, kindness, and social responsibility (Osman, 2019; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Thambusamy & Elier, 2013; Tse & Zhang, 2017). Teachers, as moral carriers, extend their roles beyond content delivery to cultivate moral disposition in learners and shape them into moral agents (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019; Pantić & Florian, 2015; Widodo, 2018). However, the specific mechanisms through which these values are embedded within formal education, particularly through language learning, remain underexplored. This research gap highlights the need to examine language instruction not merely as a tool for linguistic development, but also as a medium for instilling moral values, which is essential in shaping socially aware, empathetic individuals.

In English Language Teaching (ELT), educators must extend their instruction beyond developing linguistic competence. Shaaban (2008) emphasizes that language education should serve as a foundational opportunity to nurture emotional intelligence, foster social awareness, and support holistic well-being. Language emerges not only as a communication tool but also as a means of embedding moral values and promoting reflective self-awareness (Feng, 2019; Puspitasari et al., 2021; Widodo, 2018). However, this ideal often diverges from classroom practice. Preliminary findings from our study, conducted between January and July 2024, indicate that English language teaching at primary school level predominantly adheres to textbook-based writing tasks, which inherently constrain the depth and breadth of moral engagement and holistic development.

EFL learning provides a platform for children to acquire moral values through exposure to positive behavioral models. Yet, a significant gap remains in understanding how language acquisition can be systematically integrated with moral development, particularly for young learners. This study addresses this gap by exploring how value-oriented language instruction can facilitate linguistic competence and moral growth in primary education.

This study focuses on the integration of moral values through multimodal learning projects. While multimodal approaches, encompassing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning, have been recognized for their role in facilitating meaning-making and fostering emotional engagement in language learning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Floyd, 2021), their potential to support moral development has not been adequately explored. This study focuses on the integration of moral values through multimodal learning projects. While multimodal approaches, encompassing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning, have been recognized for enhancing meaning-making and emotional engagement in language learning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Floyd, 2021), their potential to support moral development has not been adequately explored. Research has documented the benefits of multimodal learning for language acquisition (Choi, 2015; Kress, 2010; Liruso et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2024; Yelland, 2015). However, the explicit integration of moral values, such as empathy, kindness, and social responsibility, within this framework remains under explored. By addressing this gap, this study advocates for examining how multimodal learning can simultaneously promote linguistic and moral development, offering new insights into its potential for nurturing these ethical values. This research contributes to the evolving discourse on ELT by offering a comprehensive understanding of how multimodal practices can enrich language skills while fostering character education in primary school contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multimodal Learning in Primary English Language Teaching

Multimodal learning has been acknowledged as an effective approach to 21st-century learning (Choi & Yi, 2015; Jewit, 2008). This approach caters to the learner's unique potential by engaging multiple sensory systems simultaneously and positioning students as active participants in their own learning process (Crane-Deklerk, 2020). By incorporating various modes of communication, multimodal learning expands beyond traditional linguistic modes, enabling students to represent their understanding through visual, verbal, gestural, and auditory means (Jewitt & Kress, 2003).

The concept of multimodality highlights that meaning making is not limited to only linguistic modes, but includes all semiotic resources involved in understanding meaning. Rooted in the theoretical framework of the New London Group (1996), multimodality is defined as the integration of multiple semiotic modes, combining elements such as images, text, gestures, sound and other relevant modes (Kress et al., 2005; Mills & Unsworth, 2017).

A considerable body of research has explored the role of multimodal texts in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly for young learners, highlighting their potential to enhance meaning-making and engagement in the learning process (Adoniou, 2013; Brown & Hao, 2022; Kayumova & Sadykoya, 2019; Richards, 2017; Taylor & Leung, 2019). Recent studies suggest that multimodal texts, which combine linguistic, visual, spatial, aural, and gestural modes, have become an integral part of children's daily lives due to advancements in media and mobile technologies (Yelland, 2015). These technologies not only allow children to consume content but also to create and share it, facilitating the construction of meaning across various semiotic resources (Kress, 2010). This shift has prompted educators to reconsider traditional approaches to literacy, moving towards a more inclusive model that values the diverse modes of expression children use in real life. Thus, Multimodal approaches align with new literacy frameworks, which view children as active participants in constructing meaning through dynamic interactions with their environment.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), multimodal strategies such as digital storytelling have been particularly effective in supporting linguistic and socio-emotional development. Studies have shown that digital storytelling engages young learners in genre-based activities that foster both technological and linguistic literacies (Ferdiansyah, 2023). For instance, Adoniou (2013) highlighted the synergy between drawing and writing as a powerful tool for young learners, where the integration of visual and written semiotics facilitates meaningful communication and cognitive development. This approach, known as intersemiosis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), not only supports literacy but also bridges the gap between students' home and academic literacies, making the learning process more relevant and engaging. These findings are supported by Brown and Hao (2022) who argue that multimodal resources, including drawings, music, and oral language, enrich bilingual children's multiliteracy development and allow them to express their identities and experiences. This aligns with the broader movement towards creating learning environments that honor linguistic and cultural diversity.

Despite the proven effectiveness of multimodal projects in fostering language skills, research has yet to fully explore the integration of moral values within these approaches, particularly in primary education settings. Studies such as those by Ntelioglou et al. (2014), Shin (2013), and Shin & Yi (2020) have demonstrated the benefits of incorporating multimedia tools like blogs, PowerPoint, and digital books to enhance student engagement and literacy development. However, few studies have investigated how multimodal projects can be leveraged to embed moral values in ELT. Literature on moral education underscores the importance of integrating values such as kindness, responsibility, and respect into educational practices (Widodo, 2018), particularly in the context of young learners. Puspitasari et al. (2021) emphasizes the role of teachers not only as language instructors but also as

moral guides, shaping students' character through their interactions. Given this, integrating moral values into multimodal projects could provide a more holistic approach to language education, fostering not only academic competencies but also socio-emotional and moral development.

This gap in the literature is significant, particularly as moral education has been shown to be essential for fostering responsible, compassionate individuals in both local and global contexts. While the existing research has primarily focused on the pedagogical benefits of multimodal texts for language learning, it has overlooked the potential for multimodal learning to address moral and ethical concerns, especially in diverse cultural settings. The current study seeks to address this gap by investigating how multimodal EFL learning can incorporate moral values such as environmental responsibility, empathy, and respect for cultural diversity. This approach is not limited to the Indonesian context but holds global relevance, as the need for moral literacy is universal. By integrating multimodal practices with a focus on moral education, the study aims to offer a more comprehensive framework for ELT that responds to the evolving needs of young learners in an increasingly interconnected world.

2.2. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Moral Development

Schools are spaces for cultivating both cognitive and non-cognitive skills, a pivot for children's holistic development (Lawlor, 2016). Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a pivotal framework for fostering interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, providing a foundation for moral and ethical development (Humphrey, 2013). Drawing from moral developmental psychology, research emphasizes that children develop moral concepts through experiences beyond social norms and rules (Smetana et al., 2014; Turiel, 2014). These align with SEL's core aim of building emotionally aware, empathetic individuals capable of understanding and responding to social complexities.

SEL holds transformative potential in language education by linking emotional intelligence with moral development. Language teachers are uniquely positioned to embed SEL practices that guide students in managing emotions, resolving conflicts, and fostering empathy, key competencies for moral engagement (Na-Songkhla & Wetcho, 2022). Zins et al. (2007) argue that SEL serves as a cornerstone for personal, academic, and societal success. Freire's (1993) pedagogical philosophy is relevant with this view, that to this that education is a means of humanization and social transformation. His emphasis on critical thinking and emotional awareness positions SEL as a vital approach for integrating moral values into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

Despite the growing global interest, SEL research in EFL contexts remains limited, particularly in primary education. Some teachers feel uncomfortable when addressing topics that fall within the SEL umbrella such as emotions, values, and ethics (Bai et al., 2021; Brackett, 2019). This results in an under-investigation of SEL competencies despite evidence linking SEL to academic success in general education. While research has demonstrated SEL's effectiveness in improving emotional well-being, peer relationships, and academic performance (CASEL, 2015; Dix et al., 2012), it often focuses on older learners or secondary education (Bai et al, 2021; Pentón Herrera, 2019; Strahan & Poteat, 2020). Strahan and Poteat (2020) highlight the value of SEL in English classrooms by helping students connect to social scenarios, while Bai et al. (2021) illustrate SEL's transformative effects in Second Language Acquisition. However, these studies fail to address younger learners and to explore frameworks that integrate SEL with moral dimensions and multimodal strategies.

Previous studies provide insights into SEL's role in fostering empathy and social awareness (Jiang & Gao, 2020) and embedding moral values into curricula (Shaaban, 2008). However, these works primarily focus on isolated strategies and lack a comprehensive approach to intertwining moral education as part of SEL, and multimodal methods. Bai et al. (2021) emphasize SEL's influence on English learning achievements but neglect moral integration and multimodal applications. Similarly, Pentón Herrera (2019) explores SEL practices in relationship-building but overlooks global and

multimodal contexts. This gap underscores the urgent need for research exploring how SEL can holistically integrate moral development through multimodal learning, particularly in primary EFL classrooms. By addressing this gap, this study aims to provide a globally relevant framework that aligns SEL with moral and linguistic competencies, equipping young learners with essential skills for a socially responsible future.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study distinguishes itself by addressing gaps in existing literature through a critical synthesis of linguistic, educational, and multimodal theories to explore how moral values can be integrated into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Unlike prior studies that focus on isolated strategies (Bai et al., 2021; Pentón Herrera, 2019), this research employs a robust theoretical framework that aligns multimodal literacy practices with moral and linguistic development.

The theoretical foundation draws primarily on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal theory, which emphasizes the interplay of visual, verbal, and audio elements in meaning-making processes. This approach is complemented by Unsworth's (2001) literacy development cycles (LDC), which provide a structured pedagogical model encompassing text modeling, guided construction, and independent application. These frameworks enable a holistic understanding of how multimodal practices foster language acquisition while embedding moral values through intentional design and guided reflection.

To further address the moral dimension, Freire's (1993) concept of critical literacy is incorporated, emphasizing the need to challenge learners with critical questions and reflective tasks that nurture their moral reasoning and critical thinking. Freire's perspective underscores the transformative role of education as a tool for fostering social responsibility and empathy, which aligns seamlessly with the goals of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).

This integration of theoretical perspectives responds directly to calls for research that transcends fragmented approaches to SEL and moral development (Jiang & Gao, 2020; Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016). By bridging multimodal theories with moral education, this study addresses the underrepresentation of comprehensive frameworks in existing literature. It also offers a practical rationale for its focus on primary-level EFL classrooms, where foundational moral values can be cultivated alongside language skills. This framework establishes the study's contribution to both theory and practice, offering insights into how multimodal literacy practices can engage young learners while fostering ethical and linguistic competencies.

3. Methodology

This study employed a case study approach (Yin, 2003) to examine how multimodal learning integrates English language instruction with moral values among fifth-grade students in Central Java, Indonesia. A six-week study was conducted, during which qualitative data were gathered through observations, interviews with six students, and an analysis of students' homework and course materials. The multimodal learning project was designed to embed moral principles into English lessons by incorporating sentences with verbs and adjectives related to moral behaviors, allowing students to connect language learning with everyday activities such as helping parents and cleaning.

Although the study duration aligns with action research practices, this research was conceptualized as a case study to provide an in-depth, context-rich exploration of students' engagement with multimodal learning in their natural educational setting. Unlike action research, which involves iterative cycles of intervention and reflection, this study focused on a detailed examination of student interactions and learning experiences within a specific cultural and educational context. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study, ensuring

that participants' rights and confidentiality were protected in accordance with institutional guidelines.

3.1. Participants

The study initially involved thirty students, aged 10 to 12 years, from a primary school in Central Java, Indonesia. These students were mainly native speakers of Indonesian, with some also speaking Javanese. The linguistic diversity within the group provided an opportunity to observe how students navigate between languages, as both Indonesian and Javanese were used throughout the learning activities. However, for the purpose of the in-depth case study (Yin, 2003), we focused on a smaller sample of six students chosen to represent a range of abilities and backgrounds. These six students were selected as the participants of the study using purposeful sampling based on our observation of their active participation.

The students' involvement in the study was voluntary and parental consent was obtained for their participation. Ethical guidelines were followed to ensure privacy, including the use of pseudonyms for all participants to protect their identities.

3.2. Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study (Yin, 2003) designed to explore how multimodal learning could facilitate the integration of moral values into English learning for young learners. This design was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of how multimodal affordances, including visual prompts, written tasks, and digital tools, can be used to promote both linguistic and socio-emotional skills. The study was conducted over a six-week period, during which the students were introduced to a variety of activities that ranged from writing assignments with visual aids to creating digital stories.

In the first stage of research, Unsworth's LDC (2001) of Modeled, Guided, and Independent Practices was considered as a framework into the learning process. The materials for the projects were set up to align with the dual objectives of language learning and moral value. Examples of visual text were chosen to illustrate visual prompts and sentences emphasizing moral vocabulary (for instance: help, share, respect). In this stage, media to support students were selected to enable them checking pronunciation and writing support of translation from mother language to English. We drafted a clear timeline for a 6-week study in detailed lesson plan.

In the implementation stage, three phases of Unsworth's LDC were implemented. In modeled practice, students were introduced to moral concepts and related language through visual aids, like a child helping his parents, where students were invited to use certain adjectives and verbs related to moral behavior (example: help, clean, wash). Continued with guided practice, where students practiced collaboratively under teacher's supervision. In this phase, they created sentences about moral actions using English word banks accompanied by visual illustration. In the last phase named independent practice, they applied their knowledge by creating digital artifacts using the CapCut tool. During these 6 weeks, data from the field were collected through observation, student artifacts, and interviews. These young learners were asked to voice their response during the learning process relevant to their experience.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, data was collected using a range of qualitative instruments to comprehensively capture the process and outcomes of the multimodal learning projects.

Classroom observations were conducted throughout the six-week period to document students' engagement with multimodal activities, such as visual writing which combined describing images into verbal text to insert their voice and audio into the selected composed image. These observations

focused on how students interacted with different modes of communication, such as visual aids, auditory components, and kinesthetic activities, and how these modes influenced both their language learning and moral development. During these observations, data collection includes observation notes to document student engagement and interactions, photographs and videos to capture classroom moments and final projects to visually document the learning process.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the six young learners. These interviews provided insights into students' perceptions of how multimodal learning facilitated their understanding of English language concepts and moral values. The interviews were designed to explore how students reflected on the activities, particularly in relation to the moral lessons embedded in the tasks, such as helping others and taking responsibility and gathering students' reflective comments concerning the activities and the values they learned.

In addition, students' artifacts, including written assignments, drawings, and digital stories created during the projects, were collected. These artifacts were analyzed to examine how the students expressed moral values through their language use and creative outputs, offering another layer of insight into the effectiveness of the multimodal learning approach.

3.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze the data collected from observations, interviews, and students' artifacts. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and ability to identify and explore patterns and themes from qualitative data. The data analysis comprised several key stages.

First, the data was thoroughly reviewed to familiarize the researcher with its content. This included reading through the interview transcriptions, observation notes, and students' artifacts repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of the information. During this phase, initial codes were generated that highlighted both linguistic elements, such as vocabulary and language structures, and moral themes, such as kindness, responsibility, and empathy.

The next step was to group these initial codes into broader themes that captured the integration of multimodal learning with moral values. These themes reflected how students' language learning and moral development were interconnected through multimodal activities.

The last step was interpreting the identified themes within the broader context of multimodal learning and moral development. This interpretation sought to understand how the multimodal approach contributed to students' linguistic skills and their ability to reflect on and internalize moral values in their daily lives.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were a central component of this study to ensure the protection of participants' rights and privacy. Before any data collection, parental consent was obtained for all students involved in the study. The students were informed about the study's purpose and their right to participate voluntarily, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used throughout the study, and any potentially identifying information was omitted from the data and reports. This ensured that the privacy and confidentiality of the participants were maintained. The study also adhered to ethical principles of transparency and integrity in data collection and analysis. The research was conducted with honesty and objectivity, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives. The use of multimodal tools, including digital devices such as visual and audio recorder, Google translate, and Capcut application was carefully planned to minimize

potential distractions in the classroom. Students were encouraged to use these tools responsibly, with clear guidelines on appropriate use during learning activities.

4. Results

The analysis of the data revealed two primary themes: **Intertwining Multimodal Learning with Moral Development** and **Students' Critical Reflection on Multimodal-Moral Activities.** These themes provide insights into how multimodal learning can foster both English language development and the internalization of moral values, offering contributions to the understanding of multimodal learning in a primary school context.

4.1. Integration of Multimodal Learning with Moral Development

The first theme describes how multimodal learning activities facilitated the integration of moral values with English language learning. The findings demonstrate how students were engaged with both linguistic and moral content through a variety of multimodal tasks. A series of events followed the stages of Unsworth's multimodal literacy practice from building knowledge of the text (see Figure 1), modelling of the text (see Figure 2), and independent practice of the text (see Figure 3).

The activity of building students' knowledge took one meeting and began by engaging them in recalling familiar household actions commonly performed at home, such as "tidying books," "making the bed," "sweeping the floor," "emptying the trash bin," "frying an egg," "washing dishes," and "watering plants." This activity connected everyday tasks with moral conduct by highlighting responsibilities students may already recognize in their daily routines. Vocabulary choices were intentionally aligned with young learners' linguistic capacities. During the recall process, students were first encouraged to articulate the actions in Bahasa Indonesia, subsequently translating the terms to English with Google Translate to ease their familiarity with English vocabulary. By integrating language acquisition with relatable, practical activities, this approach reinforced essential values like responsibility and helping others.

Figure 1 shows that the teacher engages students in building knowledge of the text, while Figure 2 shows that teacher modeled reading and verbalizing visual text.

Figure 1. Building Knowledge of the Text

Figure 2. Modeled Text

Displaying images to initiate reading activities (see figure 2), the teacher prompted students to convert visual cues into verbal responses, bridging students' actions with underlying moral values. Through this approach, the teacher guided students to connect observation with ethical reflection, enhancing their engagement with the material.

T: "What do you see in the picture?"

S2: "Dirty plates"

T: "Ok, write like this. I see dirty plates. Where is it?"

SS: "Kitchen"

T: "Good. What should you do?"

S5: "Clean the plates?"

T: "Perfect. I must clean the dirty plates. Now, what happens if you help?"

S6: "Cleaner?"

T: "Right. The kitchen is cleaner."

Through these interactions, the teacher facilitated story composition by guiding students in arranging narratives based on visual cues. This strategic integration of images supported moral reasoning, enabling students to internalize values such as responsibility and helpfulness through structured language production. In this guided text, we introduced guided writing, enabling students to collaboratively craft stories inspired by visual prompts depicting household tasks (See figure 3). In this part, students were guided to select visual text representing their moral conduct, accompanied by verbal text describing the image by using a critical question of "What is the problem in the image?" Audio text was introduced through the guided reading aloud (see Figure 4). By intertwining certain moral behavior like "The boy is washing the dishes" and "The boy is cleaning the bike" in their stories, students not only practiced their language skills but also engaged with these moral-social values, demonstrating how guided writing offers both linguistic and moral benefits.

Figure 3 shows the student transforming the image to verbal text, while figure 4 shows the teacher providing feedback to students.
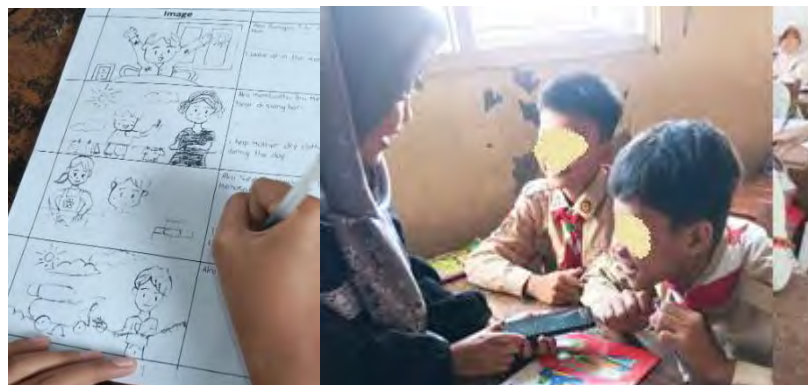
Figure 3. Guided Writing

Figure 4. Guided Reading Aloud

In these stages, we practiced visual writing and reading aloud over two meetings. Students collaboratively constructed sentences based on the images printed on paper, which not only developed their linguistic skills but also enhanced their ability to observe and interpret visual cues. Students' ability to observe visual grammar was seen in this process. During a visual writing activity, the students were prompted with deeper questions to trigger social awareness when performing moral conduct such as "What is his/her expression in this picture?" Their responses reflected a blend of observation and interpretation:

S2: "He is helping his mother in the kitchen."

S4: "He is happy."

When asked to observe the character's expression in the visual text, one student (S3) noted, "(The boy is) smiling, Miss," demonstrating the student's ability to observe images in detail,

connecting visual cues with descriptive language that performing good deeds should be sincere. Later, this sincerity understanding can be seen from students' final artifact in CapCut showing unforced expression with smiling expression (See Figure 6) and students' comment "We must help happily" (S5), and "If you help but forced your face will express anger" (S6).

In the final phase of independent writing and reading aloud practice, students independently created stories based on captured images or recorded videos as the evidence of their good deed activities at home. This process took place over two meetings, where students used the CapCut application to compose their stories. They selected pictures of daily activities containing moral conduct (see Figure 5), whether at school or home as evidence of their behavior. Multimodal affordances range from visual, verbal and audio, from arranging pictures, editing videos added by written verbal text, and adding students' own voice overs. CapCut was chosen for its accessibility, offering free templates, and user-friendly features. The application is easy to use as students can drag and drop pictures or videos into their projects, record their voices, and add written texts to create cohesive stories. The application enabled students to control their timing and presentation of their visual text by dragging the duration bar to adjust the length of time each element appeared on screen. For audio tracks, students could record or import the audio text, which could be synchronized with the visuals.

Figure 5. Students' independent text creation

Figure 6. Students' Final Multimodal Text

As the CapCut video results (Figure 6) show, students' final multimodal affordances can be seen from evidence through their integration of visual, audio, and verbal elements. Their digital storytelling is characterized by smiling and happy expressions as they narrate their stories, showcasing their engagement and confidence.

Examples of moral conduct are illustrated through images and videos accompanied by verbal text displayed at the bottom of the screen, which aligns with their audio narration. For instance, one student enthusiastically expressed, "Let's clean up, friends," and "I tidy up the messy place," followed by "I always help my parents." These statements were paired with both written and spoken texts, as well as visual representations, such as sweeping the floor and washing dishes. At this stage, students demonstrated their ability to apply sentence structures and vocabulary they had previously learned, creating coherent narratives that integrated moral and linguistic elements.

4.2. Students' Critical Reflection on Multimodal-Moral Activities

This section explores how students engaged with multimodal-moral activities and reflected on their learning process. The findings highlight the reflections of a disconnect between their lived experiences and linguistic expression, the impact of collaborative and technology-driven learning, and the transition toward autonomy through creative storytelling. These reflections offer insights into how multimodal tools and moral values can transform language education by fostering creativity, confidence, and critical thinking skills.

4.2.1. Students' reflections during visual writing activities

During the learning process, we used mixed characters to introduce non-gendered activity at homes. The integration of practical examples, such as "He is helping his mother in the kitchen" or "She is washing the motor," with moral conduct provided meaningful exposure to positive actions. Students' responses varied, emphasizing the novelty of this approach.

S1: "I've never learned English like this before."

S3: "This is new. I've never done it this way before."

Those indicate a gap between students' practical actions and their linguistic expression.

Further examples of a significant disconnect between students' lived experiences and their ability to articulate these experiences in English can be seen from S4's statement, "I often help my mother clean homes but never use it for learning English." Another student (S5) remarked, "This is weird; I never do this [linking everyday helping activity to learning English], but I like it," illustrating the novelty and appeal of linking personal experiences with language learning.

This sentence shows how everyday moral actions, such as assisting with household chores, are deeply ingrained in students' lived experiences but are not perceived as relevant to their language learning process. The student's statement reflects a missed opportunity to connect practical, meaningful activities with linguistic expression, leaving students unable to fully engage with English as a tool to describe or reflect on their contributions at home. This disconnect emphasizes the importance of integrating real-life contexts into language lessons which allows students to bridge their daily routines with learning English, fostering both moral awareness and language proficiency.

One reflection that emerged was the gendered perception of house chores. S2 reflected, "I help my mom wash the dishes, but my brother laughed at me. Helping mother is a girl's job." This response illustrates how traditional gender roles are internalized at a young age, with household tasks often viewed as the domain of females. These perceptions, however, were not expressed critically in English, revealing a gap between the students' lived experiences and their linguistic expression. This disconnect suggests a need for targeted language activities in the classroom that enable students to express their moral and emotional reflections more fully, fostering not only language acquisition but also critical thinking and moral reasoning. Along with this finding, S6 marked "Ms. Dewi said washing plates is a must for boys and girls." This indicates that classroom interventions that encourage critical reflection can challenge traditional gender roles and foster a more balanced perspective on shared responsibilities.

4.2.2. Students' reflection on collaborative learning and technology integration

As students transitioned between various modes, they practiced narrating visual content into written verbal text and continued by adding audio text in their digital text. As they performed the task in groups, they mentioned that the collaborative approach improved their English skills and confidence.

S1: "I can listen to Google Translate for reading aloud."

S6: "I practiced chatGPT. Just type from Bahasa Indonesia. [English is] easy"

S2: "Not easy for pronouncing words, but no need to feel afraid"

As students transitioned through various modes of learning, they practiced narrating from visual to written verbal texts, continuously adding audio elements to their digital creations. The collaborative approach fostered by group tasks played a crucial role in improving their English skills and boosting their confidence. Through the integration of technology, students engaged with tools such as Google Translate and ChatGPT, facilitating their language learning in new and interactive ways.

For example, the sentence "I can listen to Google Translate for reading aloud," emphasizes how technology helped them improve their pronunciation and comprehension. The statement "I practiced ChatGPT. Just type from Bahasa Indonesia. [English is] easy" highlights the ease with which they could transition between their native language and English, making the learning process feel more accessible. Reflections such as S2's "Not easy for pronouncing words, but no need to feel afraid" indicate that, although challenges with pronunciation existed, the collaborative setting and use of technology alleviated their anxieties, enabling them to take more risks in their language practice. These reflections highlight the value of incorporating technology into collaborative learning environments, where students can practice and build their language skills in a supportive, interactive context.

4.2.3. Students' transitioning to autonomy

The process of creating stories marked a significant milestone in students' literacy journey, fostering both autonomy and enjoyment. As students engaged with multimodal tools such as CapCut, they expressed enthusiasm and adaptability. This is evident from their reflection.

S3: "When I choose pictures or videos, it's easy."

S5: "I often use CapCut—it's easy, just insert pictures."

S4: "For audio, I press and record my voice."

S1: "I can change my voice up to me."

S5: "Yes, just use Effect Audio."

S2: "No need to write, just record."

S5: "Yes, the sentence will appear."

S1: "Save time."

S6: "This is fun. [It is] not only writing from textbooks."

S2: "In Capcut, [there are] a lot of templates, [it's] easier."

These comments highlight the students' preference for hands-on, technology-driven activities. The ability to use tools like CapCut simplified complex tasks, enabling students to focus on creativity and self-expression. Furthermore, students' reflections reveal how these activities fostered a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment. By blending multimodal and moral elements, the activities not only enhanced students' language skills but also nurtured critical thinking, confidence, and a sense of collaboration.

5. Discussion

5.1. Intertwining Multimodal Learning with Moral Development

The integration of various modes, ranging from verbal written text to visual, aural, and spatial modes, aligns with the principles of multimodal learning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) and moral development as implemented through Unsworth's LDC (2001). This approach emphasizes structured opportunities for students to engage with multiple modes of communication in a supportive learning environment. The study's findings underscore the critical role of authentic, contextualized language practices in linking moral conduct to meaningful English language learning. Traditional, form-focused instruction often limits students' communicative and moral engagement (Kim & Cho, 2017). By connecting language learning with students' lived experiences, this approach enriches language acquisition through a sociocultural lens, integrating moral insights (Weng, 2021). Visual texts, viewed as semiotic resources (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), serve as powerful tools for analyzing social messages. Students become active interpreters, decoding these messages to reflect on moral conduct. This pedagogical shift positions visuals not as supplementary elements but as central to meaning-making and moral reasoning (Lewison et al., 2002; Freire, 1993), reinforcing the value of multimodal approaches in fostering both language proficiency and ethical awareness.

The study highlights the role of visual texts in fostering critical literacy by prompting students to connect language to real-world actions. Reflective questions, such as "What is the problem in the image?" encourage deeper engagement with content. For instance, analyzing an image of dirty plates led students to discuss the importance of responsibility and care, illustrating their emerging ethical awareness. This approach aligns with Freire's (1993) concept of "reading the word and the world," where language serves as a tool for social and moral engagement. By combining visual cues with reflective dialogue, students enhance their ability to interpret and act upon ethical and societal issues, supporting their development as critical and socially responsible agents (Gee, 2000; Mills and Unsworth, 2017).

Incorporating everyday activities such as cleaning the home and helping with cooking into lessons addresses entrenched gender norms in Indonesian society, where domestic work is often perceived as the sole responsibility of women (Puspitasari et al., 2021). By involving both boys and girls in these tasks, this approach fosters equitable responsibility-sharing and challenges patriarchal constructs commonly practiced in society. This method aligns with broader calls for integrating gender equity into education, emphasizing that moral development cannot be separated from addressing societal inequalities, as children are strongly influenced by their observations of their environment (Smetana, 2014). Utilizing multimodal strategies, such as visual aids that depict shared domestic responsibilities, further support this transformation by enabling students to internalize values of empathy and cooperation while reimagining traditional roles.

Through a series of multimodal literacy practices, including visual writing, reading aloud, and digital storytelling projects (Unsworth & Bush, 2010), students engaged in collaborative activities that emerged as key pedagogical strategies for fostering collaboration, creativity, and moral reflection. Working in groups with assigned roles, students navigated various stages of the process, from brainstorming to editing (Ferdiansyah, 2013; Pham, 2021). This approach not only strengthened their linguistic skills but also encouraged the development of moral conduct through peer interactions. The narratives they created reflected shared ethical values, highlighting themes of responsibility and teamwork within the framework of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). By observing and learning from one another, students practiced moral reasoning in real-time, enhancing their capacity for empathy and cooperation (Lewison et al., 2002). This process aligns with contemporary theories that emphasize collaborative learning as a pathway to both cognitive and moral growth (Eng et al., 2022).

This series of activities demonstrates a shift from passive learning to active meaning-making, as evidenced by students' use of multimodal tools such as CapCut, Google Translate, and ChatGPT to support their English learning process. Students exercised autonomy by selecting visuals, recording voices, customizing effects, checking pronunciation and composing their stories in a translanguage mode. These practices reflect their transformation from passive recipients to active creators of knowledge (Palfreyman, 2020). This empowerment aligns with global educational goals of fostering agency and critical thinking (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Furthermore, such practices challenge the traditionally teacher-centered pedagogy prevalent in Indonesian classrooms, resonating with national educational policies that emphasize 21st-century skills. The integration of technology not only enhances linguistic competence but also supports broader developmental goals, including creativity and self-directed learning (Manyukhina & Wyse, 2019).

5.2. Students' Critical Reflection on Multimodal-Moral Activities

The integration of moral development within the framework of social-emotional learning (SEL) is essential for fostering whole growth in young learners. Research has shown that SEL is critical in supporting not only academic achievement but also emotional well-being, empathy, and social responsibility (Brackett, 2019; CASEL, 2015; Dix et al., 2012). However, studies such as Bai et al. (2021) and Pentón Herrera (2019) highlight the need for more comprehensive research on integrating moral awareness as part of SEL in primary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This study bridges this gap by demonstrating that students' reflections on multimodal activities not only leverage up their language skills but also provide opportunities for moral reflection. Evidence from students' reflections such as their experiences with chores, stating the gendered chores perceived by the student's family revealed the hidden social condition in Indonesia's society, revealing gender norms and moral conflicts. Smetana's (2006; 2014) framework of moral development suggests that children learn to navigate moral rules and social expectations through real-life experiences, which are reinforced by classroom interventions that challenge societal stereotypes. In this case, the teacher's reinforcement of gender-neutral responsibilities, such as in the sentence of "Ms. Dewi said washing plates is a must for boys and girls," reflects Freire's (1993) concept of critical pedagogy, where students are encouraged to question dominant social structures and internalize more equitable values. This connection between moral reasoning and SEL competencies, as suggested by Shaaban (2008) and Jiang and Gao (2020), highlights the importance of embedding moral reflection within language learning to develop responsible and empathetic individuals. By integrating moral development into the SEL framework, this study demonstrates how multimodal methods can help foster self-awareness, empathy, and responsible decision-making, essential for students' emotional and moral growth.

In the technological aspect, the use of technology in language learning offers a valuable opportunity to assist the nurturance of moral conduct. Research by Pentón Herrera (2019) and Bai et al. (2021) underscores the potential of technology to support language acquisition, yet its role in fostering moral reasoning is often overlooked. This study highlights how students' reflections on tools like Google Translate and ChatGPT in facilitating language translation from the native language to English revealed the dual benefits of technology in enhancing language learning and promoting moral awareness. The transition towards autonomy in storytelling activities, facilitated by tools such as CapCut, Google Translate and ChatGPT exemplifies how multimodal methods can support both language acquisition and moral development.

According to Freire (1993), autonomy and critical thinking are central to an education that empowers students to reflect on their roles in society. Their reflections on autonomy in selecting modes of technological assistance resonate with Brackett's (2019) emphasis on fostering a positive emotional climate through technology, which contributes to meaningful student engagement. What makes this study distinctive is the integration of moral education with technological tools. Through

multimodal resources, students were not only acquiring English proficiency but also engaging with moral values such as kindness, fairness, and respect. This aligns with Jiang and Gao's (2020) argument that embedding Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) practices within language education can cultivate empathy and social awareness—critical components of moral development. By weaving moral reflection into technology-enhanced learning activities, this study illustrates how multimodal tools can nurture both cognitive and emotional growth, fostering a holistic approach to education.

This study challenges existing research that often treats SEL and moral education as separate components (Bai et al., 2021; Shaaban, 2008). It demonstrates the potential of a holistic approach that intertwines moral development as part of SEL and multimodal methods, particularly in the context of primary EFL classrooms. By providing students with opportunities to engage with moral dilemmas through language learning activities, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for a more integrated approach to education (Jiang & Gao, 2020). The integration of SEL competencies, such as self-awareness and social responsibility, with moral education in a multimodal context has the potential to create more socially responsible and empathetic individuals. This aligns with CASEL's (2015) framework, which emphasizes the development of emotional intelligence and moral reasoning as crucial components of SEL. By connecting language learning with moral reflection and social-emotional growth, this study provides a framework that can be applied, offering insights for educators seeking to foster both cognitive and emotional growth in their students. In doing so, it underscores the importance of viewing language learning not only as an academic pursuit but as a vehicle for nurturing socially conscious and morally responsible individuals. Through this approach, teachers can equip young learners with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and interconnected world, fostering a generation of empathetic and thoughtful global citizens.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the potential of integrating moral values into multimodal literacy practices, utilizing Unsworth's stages of text construction and Kress's multimodal affordances. By embedding moral themes such as kindness, respect, and responsibility in the learning materials, students connect their lived experiences with language learning through various multimodal resources. These resources provide a platform for meaningful language practice while reinforcing moral education.

In line with Freire's critical literacy framework, this approach empowers students to critically engage with content, reflect on their societal roles, and challenge norms through dialogue and reflection. Freire's concept of literacy as a tool for social transformation is mirrored in the way students use multimodal tools not only to enhance their language skills but also to examine and express moral values that can drive personal and societal change.

Through modeling, teachers guide students in combining visual, auditory, and verbal elements to express moral values, enabling them to create digital narratives that reflect both linguistic and ethical insights. In the independent construction stage, students autonomously produce their own multimodal texts, showcasing their ability to apply moral concepts while developing their language skills.

The integration of multimodal tools with moral education enriches the learning experience, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and ethical awareness. Drawing from Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness, this approach encourages students to reflect on and question the world around them, empowering them to use literacy as a means of personal and social transformation. This approach not only enhances language acquisition but also empowers students to reflect on and express important moral values, offering a comprehensive model for educational practices that bridge cognitive and moral development.

7. Suggestion

This study opens several avenues for future research, particularly in addressing the limitations related to the small sample size and the scope of moral themes explored. Given the current focus on a small, specific sample of 6 students from a class of 30, future research could expand the sample size to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how multimodal literacy practices influence moral development across diverse student populations. A mixed-methods approach would allow researchers to combine quantitative data on language acquisition and qualitative insights into the moral and social impacts of multimodal learning, offering a richer, more holistic view of the outcomes.

Although moral values have long been a traditional focus in education, they may not always be at the forefront of contemporary curricula. This study's findings, however, highlight the potential to integrate moral values with multimodal literacy practices, opening the door for future research that examines how a broader range of moral themes such as social justice, environmental responsibility, and empathy for diverse cultures can be explored within multimodal contexts. By broadening the scope of moral education, researchers can better understand how different ethical issues can be effectively integrated into multimodal learning activities.

These areas of future research will help refine the integration of multimodal learning and moral education, offering deeper insights into how technology can be leveraged to foster both linguistic proficiency and ethical awareness in young learners.

Declarations

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About the Contributor(s)

Dewi Puspitasari is a doctoral candidate in the English Education Department at Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), Indonesia. She currently serves as a lecturer in the Department of English Education at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) KH Abdurrahman Wahid, Pekalongan, Indonesia, with over 17 years of experience teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Her research focuses on English for young learners, appliable linguistics, discourse studies, and qualitative research in English Language Teaching (ELT). Dewi has published widely in leading international journals and authored several books on education.
Email: dewisari@students.unnes.ac.id; dewi.puspitasari@uingusdur.ac.id
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6573-385X

Sri Wuli Fitriati, is a Professor of English with over twenty years of experience teaching in Indonesia. She currently serves in the English Language and Literature Department at the Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), Indonesia. Previously, she held the position of coordinator for the Master's Program in English Language Education. Her research interests include discourse studies and their applications to Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), with a particular focus on critical theories of language pedagogy. She has contributed to refereed journals and edited volumes, specializing in TEFL and Discourse Analysis.
Email: SriWuli.Fitriati@mail.unnes.ac.id
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6405-1371

Widhiyanto is a senior lecturer of English with over twenty years of teaching experience in Indonesia. He is currently the coordinator of the Doctorate Program in Language Education at Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES), Indonesia. His research interests include academic discourse studies, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and literacy, with a focus on critical theories of language pedagogy. He has published extensively in refereed journals and edited volumes, specializing in SFL and literacy.
Email: pakwidhi_english@mail.unnes.ac.id
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7351-8976

Katharina Rustipa is a Professor at Universitas Stikubank (UNISBANK), Central Java, Indonesia, with over thirty years of experience teaching English in Indonesia. She has published extensively in refereed journals and edited volumes. Her areas of specialization include language teaching methodology, discourse analysis, and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in language education. Her work is grounded in applied linguistics.
Email: katrin@edu.unisbank.ac.id
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-2767-668X