

# Exploring Junior High School Students' Experiences in Multimodal Task-Based Language Learning

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## Abstract

This study investigates how junior high school students engage with digital multimodal composing (DMC) tasks through a task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Conducted as a qualitative case study, the research involved classroom observations, interviews, and analysis of students' digital poster projects. The findings reveal that students approached the multimodal tasks through collaborative planning, negotiation of design, and creative problem-solving using digital tools. While linguistic and technical challenges occasionally hindered their progress, students displayed increasing autonomy, digital awareness, and confidence in expressing ideas through multimodal texts. These results suggest that integrating DMC into TBLT not only strengthens students' writing competence but also cultivates meaningful participation in digital literacy practices. The study provides insights into how task-based multimodal projects can bridge language learning and digital communication for young EFL learners.

**Keywords:** Digital Multimodal Composing; Task-Based Language Teaching; Case Study; Writing; Multimodal Text

## INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital technology into education has significantly transformed the nature of literacy and language learning. In today's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, writing is no longer confined to printed words or paper-based activities. Learners are increasingly expected to communicate and express meaning through multiple modes written text, images, colors, and layout using digital platforms. This shift represents a movement toward multimodal literacy, which emphasizes how meaning is constructed across different semiotic modes rather than relying solely on linguistic elements (Wang, 2022). In this context, Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) has emerged as a pedagogical practice that enables students to design texts integrating visual, spatial, and linguistic resources through digital tools (Jiang & Hafner, 2024). DMC not only supports students' creativity but also encourages them to participate in authentic digital communication, a skill increasingly required in modern education. Despite growing interest in multimodal approaches to writing, most DMC-related studies have focused on university students, emphasizing product quality or learners' perceptions (Akoto, 2021; Lim & Polio, 2020). However, little is known about how younger EFL learners particularly those in junior high school experience digital multimodal composing within formal classroom settings. Previous research often takes a product-oriented approach, analyzing the final multimodal texts without paying sufficient attention to how students plan, negotiate, and collaborate throughout the composing process (Sari, 2022; Navila et al., 2023). Similar findings were also highlighted by Firdausya et al. (2023), who noted that multimodal projects at the secondary level tend to be underexplored despite their potential to enhance engagement and creativity. Likewise, Xujie (2023) pointed out that most multimodal writing

studies still lack qualitative insights into how learners manage challenges and develop strategies during composing. This leaves a research gap in understanding the strategies, challenges, and learning processes involved when younger learners engage with DMC. Addressing this gap is essential because early exposure to multimodal literacy may help students develop stronger digital awareness and communication competence in their later education.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a relevant pedagogical framework for implementing DMC because both approaches emphasize authentic language use, meaningful interaction, and learner-centered engagement. In TBLT, learners complete tasks that mirror real-world communication through pre-task, task, and post-task stages (Ellis et al., 2019). When integrated with DMC, this framework allows students to construct meaning collaboratively while designing digital products that combine linguistic and visual elements. Such integration not only enhances students' writing competence but also develops their creativity, digital literacy, and teamwork. This study aims to explore how junior high school EFL students engage with DMC tasks within a TBLT framework. Specifically, it investigates the strategies students employ, the challenges they encounter, and the learning experiences they develop throughout the process. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for EFL teachers and curriculum designers seeking to incorporate task-based multimodal projects into writing instruction to make classroom learning more engaging, authentic, and relevant to the digital age.

## **METHOD**

In this research, a qualitative case study design was selected to explore how junior high school students engaged in Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) tasks through the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework. As Creswell (2014) explains, a case study allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of a bounded system within its real-life context. Similarly, Yin (2018) emphasizes that the case study approach is suitable for examining complex classroom phenomena where multiple sources of evidence are analyzed. The participants consisted of one eighth-grade class with a total of 44 students, comprising 23 female and 21 male students, ranging in age from 13 to 14 years old. at a junior high school in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia. The DMC task was implemented in the form of a digital poster project that followed the three stages of the TBLT cycle. In the pre-task stage, students analyzed sample posters to identify key language and design features. During the task stage, they worked collaboratively in small groups using Canva to design English digital posters, distribute roles, and negotiate meaning through discussion. In the post-task stage, students presented their completed posters, received peer and teacher feedback, and reflected on their learning through weekly journals. Data were collected over four meetings through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, students' digital poster projects, and weekly journals. The observations focused on students' participation and collaboration during the pre-task, task, and post-task stages, while interviews and journals provided insights into their learning experiences, strategies, and challenges. The collected data were analyzed thematically following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (Miles & Huberman, 1994) framework, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation among the data sources was used to ensure the validity of the findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

Based on the data obtained from classroom observations, interviews, weekly journals, and product documentation, the findings reveal how students engaged in completing digital multimodal composing (DMC) tasks under the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework. The overall results show that students were actively involved throughout the task process, demonstrating collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving in both linguistic and digital contexts.

From the classroom observation, it was evident that students showed high engagement during group work. They participated actively in discussions, planned their poster designs collaboratively, and distributed tasks among members. Each group divided roles such as writer, designer, and editor to manage their work efficiently. The observation notes confirmed that these roles were clearly recorded during the pre-task stage, ensuring that each member contributed.

*“We choose them ourselves, based on our preferences, Miss.”*  
**(Interview, RNP)**

*“The task distribution was based on each person's abilities.”*  
**(Interview, CAJ)**

Collaboration also emerged as a central strategy. Students often helped each other during the design process, particularly when facing vocabulary or technical difficulties. Observation notes recorded moments of cooperation when some students assisted their peers in editing and translating English expressions. This pattern was echoed in the interviews, these findings suggest that collaboration not only improved their task completion but also built social interaction and mutual respect among students.

*“Our strategy? Helping each other, sis. For example, if I'm confused about the words, Ade helps me. Whatever it is, we help each other.”*  
**(Interview, AJ)**

*“Some people didn't agree with changing this or that image, so we had different opinions. We had to agree on what we wanted. The key is patience.”*  
**(Interview, AFP)**

The data also indicate that students relied heavily on digital tools to support their multimodal composing process. They used Canva, Google Images, and Pinterest to explore design inspirations and refine visual elements in their posters. Observation records showed that students frequently explored Canva's templates, modifying fonts and colors to align with their chosen themes. These actions reflect students' growing digital literacy and creative decision-making.

*“We searched for inspiration on Google, like looking for examples of library-related posters.”*  
**(Interview, RNP)**

*“We discussed it again and looked for inspiration on Pinterest.”*  
**(Interview, YK)**

Despite technical constraints, students developed strategies to overcome obstacles. Some groups experienced poor internet connections or device limitations, yet they managed to adapt. These accounts show that students combined digital problem-solving with linguistic support, demonstrating autonomy and resilience in the learning process.

*“When the signal was bad, we moved to an open area. If we didn’t know the English words, we asked the teacher or used a dictionary to translate.”*  
**(Interview, ZNL)**

*“Ask the teacher for the grammar that is in the poster.”*  
**(Weekly Journal, Group 6)**

A consistent theme that appeared in students’ reflections was their effort to make their posters visually appealing and easy to understand. Weekly journals revealed that all groups paid attention to the layout, color, and font choices. Product documentation analysis confirmed these statements, showing that students revised their designs to improve clarity and visual balance. For instance, Group 6 added a slogan and modified the color scheme to enhance readability.

*“We made the poster as interesting, concise, and beautiful as possible.”*  
**(Weekly Journal, Group 3)**

*“The font must be appropriate, the images should be attractive, and the text needs to be short, concise, and clear.”*  
**(Weekly Journal, Group 5)**

Beyond the technical and design aspects, the data also highlight meaningful language learning experiences. Interviews and journals revealed that students felt their vocabulary and grammar improved through the project. These linguistic developments were visible in the poster revisions, where grammatical errors decreased, and sentence structures became clearer.

*“We learned grammar, Sis, so we understand it better and remember English grammar again.”*  
**(Interview, AJ)**

*“I expanded my English vocabulary and gained a little more understanding of English sentences.”*  
**(Interview, CAJ)**

Students’ engagement also extended to the affective domain. Many participants reported feeling motivated and proud of their group outcomes despite occasional frustration. These experiences show that DMC tasks encouraged students to develop collaboration and emotional regulation while engaging in authentic communication.

*“Sometimes it was fun, but sometimes it was frustrating, Miss. It was really difficult to manage the group. The same people were always doing the work, even though we had divided up the tasks.”*

**(Interview, RNP)**

*“It was fun because we could help each other.”*  
**(Interview, AJ)**

During the presentation phase, students demonstrated increased confidence in explaining their posters in English. Although they initially felt anxious, they perceived this as part of their learning journey. This performance stage provided an opportunity for students to connect their written and visual messages with spoken language, reinforcing both linguistic and communicative competence.

*“I felt nervous, and the most challenging part was speaking in English. I was anxious, satisfied, and worried at the same time.”*

*(Weekly Journal, Group 4)*

In summary, the results illustrate that students' engagement in DMC under the TBLT framework fostered creativity, collaboration, digital literacy, and linguistic improvement. They developed strategies to manage technical and language difficulties, worked together to design meaningful multimodal texts, and gained valuable experience through authentic language use and digital creation.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study show that the implementation of Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) within the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework fostered active engagement among junior high school students. Throughout the task cycle, students demonstrated collaboration, creativity, and digital problem-solving skills while composing English multimodal texts. These findings align with previous studies asserting that DMC promotes meaningful learning by integrating linguistic and visual elements in authentic communication (Yu, Zhang, & Liu, 2024). A central finding was students' strong collaborative engagement. During group work, learners distributed roles such as writer, editor, and designer, and supported each other linguistically and technically. This mirrors Akoto's (2021) observation that collaboration in multimodal composition not only improves task outcomes but also develops interpersonal and communicative skills. The students' mutual assistance during the DMC process also reflects the TBLT principle of social interaction as a means for language development (Ellis et al., 2019).

Students also demonstrated strategic and creative use of digital tools, particularly in using Canva and online resources to design visually appealing posters. This echoes Jiang and Hafner's (2024) findings that DMC tasks stimulate learners' creativity by allowing them to experiment with multiple semiotic resources. The active exploration of layout, color, and typography observed in this study indicates students' growing multimodal awareness and digital literacy key skills in 21st-century EFL learning contexts. Another notable finding was students' resilience and problem-solving ability. Despite limited devices and unstable internet connections, learners adapted by sharing tools, moving locations, and using bilingual resources for vocabulary support. This autonomy reflects what Norris (2009, as cited in (Morgana, 2023)) describes as learner agency students taking responsibility for their learning through adaptive strategies in authentic contexts.

Finally, the affective dimension of learning was also evident. Students expressed both enjoyment and frustration during the project, yet they consistently showed pride and motivation upon completing their posters. This emotional engagement reinforces (Xujie, 2023) argument that DMC tasks activate affective engagement by connecting learners' personal interests with collaborative creation. The presentation phase further strengthened students' confidence in using English to explain their digital work, demonstrating the communicative benefits of integrating DMC within the TBLT cycle. These findings support the pedagogical potential of combining Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) in EFL writing. By engaging in multimodal tasks, students not only improved their linguistic competence but also developed digital literacy, collaboration, and creativity skills essential for modern language learners. These findings suggest that integrating DMC into TBLT-based writing instruction can enhance both linguistic and digital literacies, offering a practical framework for fostering communicative, creative, and technologically competent EFL learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom.

## CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the integration of Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) within the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework provided meaningful learning experiences for junior high school students. The findings reveal that students engaged actively throughout the task process by collaborating, sharing responsibilities, and making creative decisions in designing digital posters. They also demonstrated growing digital awareness and linguistic development as they negotiated meaning and solved problems during the composing process. Moreover, students' reflections indicated that DMC tasks encouraged them to express ideas more confidently while developing a sense of ownership and cooperation within their groups. Despite encountering linguistic and technical challenges, they showed persistence and adaptability in completing their multimodal projects. This study affirms that combining DMC and TBLT can serve as a valuable approach to foster students' engagement, creativity, and multimodal literacy in EFL writing classrooms, particularly at the junior high school level.

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