

Exploring Multimodal Texts in Education: A Genre Analysis of Digital Learning Materials for EFL Students

Sarah Shabrina Fadhillah¹, Yogi Setia Samsi², Revina Pinkan Septiani³

Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang, Indonesia

¹shabrinafdla@gmail.com, ²yogi.setiasamsi@staff.unsika.ac.id, ³revinapinkan03@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the use of multimodal texts and genre-based pedagogy in fully digital learning materials for fifth-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study applies Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine three Indonesian EFL digital learning units: Rock n Roll, Wild West, and Museum of the Future. Although multimodal approaches are recognized in language education, few studies examine their application across complete digital units. Focusing on three Indonesian EFL units: Rock n Roll, Wild West, and Museum of the Future, the research applies genre analysis and multimodal discourse analysis to explore how linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive modes, together with instructional, descriptive, expository, procedural, and narrative genres, support grammar teaching, vocabulary building, and learner engagement. Findings indicate that these resources integrate multiple semiotic modes and genre variations to contextualize learning and enhance communicative competence. However, limitations such as inconsistent scaffolding, minimal vocabulary recycling, and the absence of embedded audiovisual content reduce alignment with multimedia learning principles. Recommendations are offered to improve digital material design through stronger multimodal integration, broader genre inclusion, and adaptive features for diverse learners.

Keywords: Digital Learning Materials; Educational Technology; EFL Students; Genre Analysis; Multimodal Texts

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, rapid developments in digital technology have transformed various aspects of human life, with education undergoing some of the most significant changes. One particularly notable shift has occurred in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where traditional, text-based approaches are increasingly being replaced by dynamic, interactive, and multimodal strategies (Richards, 2020). Digital tools now enable the integration of texts, images, audio, video, and interactive components into language learning, offering richer and more engaging experiences for learners (Jewitt, 2014). This evolution reflects broader changes in communication practices, as learners today interact with multiple modes of meaning-making both inside and outside the classroom (Kress, 2017). Multimodal texts, which combine linguistic, visual, spatial, auditory, and interactive elements, have become increasingly important in contemporary EFL pedagogy (Bezemer & Kress, 2016). In primary-level EFL contexts, digital learning materials allow learners to engage with language in more contextualized and meaningful ways through visually rich and interactive content (Widyaningrum et al., 2024). Research has shown that multimodal learning environments can enhance comprehension, engagement, retention, and communicative competence by appealing to different sensory channels and learning styles (Mayer, 2005; Abdullah et al., 2022). For young learners, multimodal resources such as story-based animations, digital games, and thematic visuals provide authentic and meaningful opportunities to develop language skills

while engaging with content relevant to their everyday experiences (Pinter, 2017; Hafner et al., 2022). Furthermore, multimodal activities encourage learners to construct and interpret meaning through multiple semiotic resources, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and authentic communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Carcamo & Pino, 2025; Kustini et al., 2020). Several previous studies have explored multimodal learning in EFL contexts. Abdullah et al. (2022) investigated genre-based multimodal text analysis and found that multimodal instruction can enhance students' communicative competence. Ilmi et al. (2020) examined the use of digital multimodal texts in EFL classrooms and reported positive impacts on learner engagement and multiliteracies development. Similarly, Widyaningrum et al. (2024) explored the adoption of digital multimodal texts during EFL teaching practicum and highlighted their potential as effective instructional tools. These studies demonstrate the educational value of multimodal approaches in supporting language learning and learner engagement.

However, most previous studies have primarily focused on classroom implementation, learner perceptions, or the outcomes of multimodal activities. Limited attention has been given to the systematic analysis of multimodal features and genre distributions embedded within complete digital learning units. Furthermore, few studies have examined how different genres and semiotic modes interact to support language learning objectives in elementary-level EFL digital materials. This limitation suggests the need for further research that investigates the design and pedagogical organization of multimodal digital learning materials in a more comprehensive manner. Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by combining Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis to investigate entire digital learning units rather than isolated classroom activities or individual multimodal tasks. The study specifically focuses on Indonesian fifth-grade EFL digital materials and examines how genres, multimodal resources, and pedagogical functions are integrated to support language learning. This integrated perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of multimodal material design in primary EFL education.

Despite the growing interest in multimodal approaches, designing effective multimodal EFL materials remains challenging. Researchers have noted the difficulty of achieving a balanced integration of modes to avoid cognitive overload while ensuring that all elements contribute meaningfully to learning (Plass & Jones, 2005). Furthermore, ensuring that multimodal tasks are contextually relevant and culturally appropriate remains an important concern (Tomlinson, 2016). In genre-based pedagogy, these challenges are compounded by the need to integrate multiple genres, such as descriptive, narrative, expository, and instructional texts, in ways that support learners' communicative goals (Hyland, 2007). Genre theory emphasizes that different text types serve different social purposes, and exposure to multiple genres helps learners develop versatile literacy skills (Derewianka, 2015). Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How are multimodal texts utilized in digital learning materials for young EFL learners? (2) How are different genres integrated within the materials to support language learning? and (3) How do multimodal resources and genre-based features contribute to the pedagogical functions of the materials?

To address these questions, this study draws on Eggins' (2004) framework of Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which together enable a systematic examination of how different genres and modes function within digital learning units. Genre Analysis provides a means to categorize texts according to their social purposes and structural stages, while Multimodal Discourse Analysis examines the interplay of linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive resources in meaning-making. This dual-theoretical approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how multimodal, genre-based pedagogy operates in practice.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the integration of multimodal elements and genre-based pedagogy in digital EFL learning materials. As Creswell (2018) emphasizes, qualitative description is particularly valuable for exploring educational materials in their natural context, allowing for a detailed account of their features and pedagogical functions. The research design is grounded in Eggins’ (2004) Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, enabling a systematic examination of both textual genres and multimodal resources. Genre Analysis was used to identify the types, structures, and purposes of texts within the materials, while Multimodal Discourse Analysis explored the interaction between linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive modes in meaning-making. The dataset consists of three PDF-based slideshow units used in Indonesian fifth-grade EFL classrooms, each containing textual explanations, structured tasks, visual illustrations, and hyperlinks to external resources: 1) Unit 3 – Rock n Roll: Focus on the simple future tense and music-related vocabulary, 2) Unit 5 – Wild West: Grammatical structures and cultural knowledge, 3) Unit 8 – Museum of the Future: First conditional and work-related vocabulary. The units were chosen following Tomlinson’s (2016) recommendation to use representative samples that showcase thematic and structural variety.

The analysis was conducted in three sequential stages. First, genre categorization was carried out to identify the presence of instructional, descriptive, expository, procedural, and narrative genres, drawing on linguistic and structural criteria outlined by Eggins (2004) and Derewianka (2015). Second, multimodal coding was applied to classify modes, linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive, and to determine their pedagogical functions, such as scaffolding, vocabulary reinforcement, and learner engagement, in line with frameworks proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and Jewitt (2013). Finally, a pedagogical alignment assessment evaluated the materials against the principles of genre-based pedagogy (Martin & Rose, 2012; Hyland, 2007) and multimedia learning theory (Mayer, 2005; Plass & Jones, 2005) to determine how effectively they supported scaffolding, contextualization, and learner interaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the three digital EFL learning units, Rock n Roll, Wild West, and Museum of the Future, reveals a deliberate combination of multiple genres, multimodal features, and pedagogical functions that work together to support language learning.

Table 1. Genre distribution in the three digital learning units

Digital Learning Materials	Primary Genres Present	Frequency
<i>Unit 3 – Rock n Rolls</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instructional Text: Covers “going to” usage, time-telling, and assessments. ● Expository: Definitions and examples for grammar/vocabulary. ● Descriptive: Music profession vocabulary (e.g., “backing singer”, “drum kit”). 	6 Genres

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interactive Material: Games, discussion prompts, and group activities. ● Vocabulary Builder: Music terms and time expressions. ● Narrative/Imaginative: Creative group project on future plans. 	
Unit 5 – Wild West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instructional Text: Clear objectives, explanations, and examples. ● Descriptive Text: Describes materials/objects and defines the Wild West. ● Expository Genre: Grammar explanations (“We use ‘be made of’ when...”). ● Procedural Genre: Guided practice sections like “Let’s Practice!”. ● Multimodal Instruction: Video link for audiovisual input. 	5 Genres
Unit 8 – Museum of the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instructional Text: Structured with learning objectives, explanations, examples, and interactive exercises. ● Interactive Learning Material: Pair work, games, conditional sentence practice. ● Descriptive Text: Job roles with definitions (e.g., “A farmer is someone who works in agriculture”). ● Procedural Genre: Step-by-step tasks (e.g., “Write a description...”, “Complete the chart...”). ● Definition/Exposition: Introduction of grammatical concepts (e.g., “We use the first conditional when...”). 	5 Genres

The genre distribution across the three digital learning units demonstrates not only variation in text types but also deliberate pedagogical design choices. As shown in Table 1, Unit 3 – Rock n Roll presents the highest diversity with six genres, including narrative/imaginative tasks that allow learners to explore language creatively. This aligns with Hyland’s (2007) advocacy for genre pedagogy that supports varied communicative purposes, ensuring that learners engage with language in contexts that require both accuracy and creativity. The balance between instructional, descriptive, and interactive genres also reflects Derewianka’s (2015) emphasis on

integrating multiple text types to foster literacy development in authentic and meaningful contexts.

In Unit 5 – Wild West and Unit 8 – Museum of the Future, the genre variety is slightly narrower, each containing five primary genres. However, both still incorporate multimodal and procedural elements that encourage learner participation. The presence of guided practice sections, such as “Let’s Practice!” in Unit 5, supports what Tomlinson (2016) describes as the importance of materials development that is interactive and learner-centered. Meanwhile, the Museum of the Future unit integrates definition/exposition and structured instructional text, which resonates with Hafner et al. (2022), who argue that explicit scaffolding in digital literacies enables learners to navigate complex multimodal tasks effectively.

From a multimodal perspective, the use of different genres within these units also reflects Bezemer and Kress’s (2016) assertion that meaning-making in education relies on the interplay of multiple semiotic modes. Instructional and expository genres provide the linguistic foundation, while interactive and imaginative genres incorporate visual, spatial, and performative modes that foster richer engagement. Abdullah et al. (2022) further highlight that combining genres within multimodal texts can enhance students’ multimodal communicative competence, as learners are exposed to a variety of social purposes and communicative contexts.

In addition, the inclusion of descriptive and vocabulary-building genres in all three units supports Plass and Jones’s (2005) cognitive theory of multimedia learning, which underscores the benefit of integrating verbal and visual information for second language acquisition. Carcamo and Pino (2025) demonstrate similar findings, showing that tasks involving multimodal representations, such as infographics, can deepen learners’ understanding of vocabulary and concepts. Moreover, the narrative/imaginative genre in Unit 3 can be linked to Kustini et al. (2020), who found that creative multimodal tasks promote not only linguistic skills but also digital literacy, as students must navigate between modes to construct meaning. The genre diversity observed in these materials reflects the principles of Genre-Based Pedagogy (Martin & Rose, 2012) while leveraging the affordances of multimodality (Kress, 2017; Jewitt, 2014). This combination enables a richer, more engaging learning experience, while also preparing students for the multimodal communicative demands of contemporary language use.

Table 2. Multimodal features across units

Mode	Unit 3 (Rock n Roll)	Unit 5 (Wild West)	Unit 8 (Museum of the Future)
Linguistics	Grammar explanations (6+)	Grammar rules (3+)	First conditional (7+)
Visual	Bolded headings, implied images	Bullet points, section, breaks	Bolded job definitions
Spatial	Clock diagrams (time-telling)	Structured charts	Numbered tasks
Interactive	Group project, games	“Let’s Practice!” tasks	Pair work activity
Digital/Audio	YouTube links	Video reference	None

The multimodal features outlined in Table 2 reveal that each unit employs a strategic combination of linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive resources to enhance learning outcomes. Consistent with Bezemer and Kress’s (2016) social semiotic framework, these resources are not merely decorative but function as meaning-making tools that scaffold

comprehension and engagement. For instance, in Unit 3 – Rock n Roll, the integration of clock diagrams to support time-telling not only contextualizes grammar explanations but also aligns with Mayer’s (2005) cognitive theory of multimedia learning, specifically the dual coding principle, where visual and verbal modes reinforce each other to facilitate retention.

Unit 5 – Wild West similarly leverages visual organization through bullet points and structured charts, providing clear segmentation of information, which is known to reduce cognitive load in complex learning tasks (Plass & Jones, 2005). Meanwhile, Unit 8 – Museum of the Future uses bolded job definitions and numbered tasks, echoing Eggins’s (2004) observation that textual salience and logical sequencing can guide learners’ reading paths and comprehension processes. Such features are particularly valuable for younger EFL learners, as emphasized by Pinter (2017), because they provide clear visual cues that support task completion and conceptual clarity. However, the table also reveals a significant imbalance in digital/audio integration. Rock n Roll and Wild West include YouTube links or video references, offering multimodal exposure that aligns with Hafner et al.’s (2022) findings on the role of audiovisual input in enhancing digital literacies and communicative competence. This type of integration can also foster pronunciation modeling, listening comprehension, and cultural immersion, consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2001) notion of multimodal discourse as a convergence of meaning-making channels. In contrast, Museum of the Future’s lack of auditory components limits opportunities for auditory learners, as well as for multimodal reinforcement of linguistic input, a gap that Abdullah et al. (2022) argue can weaken the development of students’ multimodal communicative competence.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the multimodal configurations in these units echo Ilmi et al. (2020), who found that the strategic orchestration of visual, spatial, and linguistic modes in digital materials can transform classroom practices by making content more accessible and engaging. Nonetheless, the uneven distribution of audio resources suggests that while these units embody many principles of multimodal learning, there is still scope for improving balance across modes to ensure inclusivity for diverse learner profiles.

Table 3. Pedagogical functions of the digital learning materials

Digital Learning Materials	Pedagogical Functions
<i>Unit 3 – Rock n Roll</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grammar Focus: “Going to” for plans/predictions (Pages 7–12). ● Vocabulary: Music-themed terms (Pages 5–6) and time expressions (Pages 15–25). ● Interactive Tasks: Group field-trip planning (Page 13), clock-drawing (Page 25). ● Speaking & Writing Practice: Presentations and individual tasks. ● Listening & Viewing: Implicit through video material.
<i>Unit 5 – Wild West</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grammar Focus: “Be made of,” “used for,” and possessive apostrophes. ● Vocabulary Building: Wild West-themed terms (e.g., “cowboys”). ● Interactive Engagement: “Let’s Practice!” (Page 6) for active learning.
<i>Unit 8 – Museum of the Future</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grammar Focus: Teaches the first conditional through examples (Pages 3–17). ● Vocabulary Building: Job-related terms (Pages 18–24).

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- **Interactive Engagement:** Pair work and hypothetical thinking (Pages 16–17).
 - **Building:** Job-related terms (Pages 18–24).
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The pedagogical functions presented in Table 3 indicate that all three units share a strong emphasis on explicit grammar teaching, thematic vocabulary development, and interactive engagement. Unit 3 – Rock n Roll extends beyond these core functions by incorporating integrated skills practice, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which supports the development of communicative competence, as described by Abdullah et al. (2022). Thematically, vocabulary building is coherent within each unit; however, the lack of systematic recycling across units raises concerns for long-term retention, a point highlighted by Tomlinson (2016), who stresses sustained exposure as a key to vocabulary mastery. Interactive activities are a recurring feature in all units, reflecting the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based learning, where active learner participation and collaborative problem-solving are prioritized. This aligns with Ilmi et al. (2020), who found that digital multimodal texts, when paired with meaningful tasks, can transform classroom engagement within multiliteracies pedagogy. Nonetheless, the absence of differentiated pathways for varying proficiency levels suggests that these materials could better accommodate learner diversity, in line with Vicentini et al. (2022), who advocate adaptive, technology-supported, genre-based instruction.

When the findings from genre distribution, multimodality, and pedagogical functions are considered together, a layered pattern emerges. The diversity of genres across the units reflects the principles of genre pedagogy, as outlined by Derewianka (2015) and Hyland (2007), where varied text types address different communicative purposes and scaffold literacy development. Martin and Rose (2012) further emphasize that genre variation supports mapping cultural and communicative practices. In this set of materials, procedural genres facilitate interactive engagement, while descriptive genres strengthen thematic vocabulary learning, consistent with Abdullah et al. (2022), who note that multimodal genre-based instruction fosters communicative competence. From a multimodal perspective, the consistent orchestration of linguistic, visual, and spatial modes reflects the semiotic layering essential for meaning-making (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Kress, 2017). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) stress that effective multimodal design relies on the integration of these resources, while Mayer's (2005) multimedia learning theory supports the value of combining verbal and visual input for deeper comprehension. However, the uneven provision of digital/audio resources, particularly the absence of such materials in Unit 8 – Museum of the Future, points to missed opportunities for enhancing multimodal literacy (Hafner et al., 2022). Carcamo and Pino (2025) further argue that digital tools such as infographics can significantly boost learner engagement by providing visually anchored, multimodal representations of content.

Overall, the materials demonstrate strong alignment with genre-based and multimodal learning theories, yet they would benefit from three key improvements: (1) more consistent multimedia integration across units to cater to diverse learning styles, (2) systematic vocabulary recycling to support retention, and (3) adaptive design features to address varying learner proficiency levels. These enhancements would align with the call by Widyaningrum et al. (2024) for integrated multimodal instructional designs that support cumulative, inclusive learning trajectories.

Discussion

The findings have several pedagogical and design implications for EFL digital learning material development. First, the observed diversity of genres across units confirms the value of genre-based instruction in scaffolding learners' literacy skills and communicative competence (Derewianka, 2015; Hyland, 2007). Material developers should maintain and further expand this diversity to address a wider range of communicative purposes, ensuring that learners are exposed to procedural, descriptive, expository, and interactive genres in balanced proportions (Martin & Rose, 2012).

Second, the multimodal features embedded in the units demonstrate the potential of combining linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive resources to enhance meaning-making (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Kress, 2017). However, the uneven distribution of digital/audio modes, particularly the omission in Unit 8, suggests that future materials should integrate multimodal resources consistently. This is crucial for supporting diverse learning styles and fostering digital multimodal literacy, as recommended by Hafner et al. (2022) and Carcamo and Pino (2025). Incorporating varied media formats such as videos, infographics, and interactive simulations would align with Mayer's (2005) multimedia learning principles and offer richer learning experiences.

Third, the thematic vocabulary instruction in these materials is coherent but lacks cross-unit recycling, which risks limited retention. Future designs should integrate spaced repetition and interleaved vocabulary practice to strengthen lexical recall, in line with Tomlinson's (2016) emphasis on sustained exposure. This could be operationalized through cumulative vocabulary banks, cross-unit tasks, or adaptive review activities.

Fourth, while interactive tasks are present in all units, the absence of differentiated learning pathways means that learners with varying proficiency levels may not equally benefit. Developers could adopt adaptive genre-based frameworks (Vicentini et al., 2022) and provide tiered task versions or optional extension activities, ensuring inclusivity and challenge for all learners.

Finally, the layered integration of genre, multimodality, and pedagogical design observed in this analysis offers a blueprint for developing EFL digital learning materials that are both engaging and pedagogically robust. Following Widyaningrum et al. (2024), such integration should be intentional, with cross-unit scaffolding to build cumulative competence rather than isolated skill episodes. By addressing the identified gaps, consistent multimodal integration, vocabulary recycling, and adaptive pathways, future digital learning resources can more effectively promote communicative competence and multimodal literacy in diverse EFL contexts.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the three digital EFL learning units, Rock n Roll, Wild West, and Museum of the Future, offers valuable insights into the integration of multimodal texts and genre-based pedagogy in language teaching. These materials effectively combine diverse genres, including instructional, expository, descriptive, and interactive texts, to create a comprehensive learning experience aligned with contemporary teaching approaches. By incorporating multiple modes of communication (linguistic, visual, spatial, and interactive), the units address varied learning styles, enhancing comprehension, participation, and retention. A key strength lies in their genre diversity, which supports Martin and Rose's genre-based pedagogy by exposing learners to different text types and language functions. The inclusion of interactive tasks, such as pair work

and games, fosters communicative competence and aligns with sociocultural learning principles. Thematic contextualization, such as music-related vocabulary in Rock n Roll or cultural content in Wild West, links grammar and vocabulary to meaningful real-world contexts, reinforcing language learning outcomes.

Despite these strengths, the study identifies several areas for improvement. The absence of embedded audiovisual elements reduces opportunities for engagement and retention, as suggested by multimedia learning theory (Yu et al., 2024). Limited vocabulary recycling and inconsistent scaffolding may hinder long-term lexical retention and learner progression (Vicentini et al., 2022). Furthermore, the lack of adaptive features restricts the materials' capacity to address diverse learner needs, an issue underscored by research on personalized learning.

To address these gaps, future material development should: 1) Integrate multimedia elements, such as short videos or audio clips, to enrich learning experiences, 2) Systematically recycle vocabulary across units to reinforce retention, 3) Apply scaffolding more consistently, introducing preparatory exercises before complex tasks, 4) Incorporate adaptive features, such as differentiated assignments or interactive quizzes, to cater to varied skill levels and learning preferences.

In summary, multimodal, genre-based digital materials hold significant potential to transform EFL learning by making it more engaging, contextualized, and effective. While the current units demonstrate strong pedagogical design, their full potential can only be realized through improvements in audiovisual integration, vocabulary recycling, scaffolding, and personalization. By addressing these areas, future resources can better support young EFL learners, fostering not only language acquisition but also critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence. As digital technologies evolve, language teaching materials must adapt to remain relevant, inclusive, and impactful in an interconnected world.

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