

A DIGITAL MULTILITERACIES BASED ENGLISH TEACHING MODEL FOR ISLAMIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

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The integration of digital technology into English Language Teaching (ELT) has become an increasingly significant pedagogical direction in response to the demands of 21st-century literacy and global communication. However, Islamic primary schools face distinctive challenges in adopting digital and multimodal ELT practices due to religious and ethical constraints related to the use of music, anthropomorphic imagery, and certain representational visuals. This study proposes and examines a Digital Multiliteracies-Based English Teaching Model specifically designed for Islamic primary school contexts. Employing a qualitative case study approach at SD Al Mubarak Cendekia Islamic School, the research explores how English teachers adapt multiliteracies pedagogy to align with Islamic educational values while sustaining student engagement and communicative competence. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and instructional document analysis. The findings indicate that ethically grounded digital multiliteracies—utilizing symbolic visuals, text-based animations, narration, and kinesthetic digital activities—can effectively support language learning without violating Islamic principles. The study concludes that digital multiliteracies offer a viable, culturally sustaining, and ethically appropriate framework for English instruction in Islamic primary education.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential component of primary education in Indonesia due to its role in global communication, academic mobility, and access to international knowledge. In response to this demand, English Language Teaching (ELT) at the primary level has increasingly incorporated digital technologies and multimodal instructional practices. Contemporary ELT approaches often emphasize the use of music, animated characters, and visually rich storytelling to engage young learners and facilitate language acquisition.

However, Islamic primary schools operate within specific religious, moral, and ethical frameworks that regulate instructional content and media use. The restriction or avoidance of music, anthropomorphic images, and entertainment-oriented visuals presents a pedagogical dilemma for teachers who wish to adopt modern ELT methodologies without compromising Islamic values. Consequently, teachers are required to negotiate between global pedagogical expectations and locally grounded religious norms.

The rapid development of digital technology in the 21st century has significantly transformed English language teaching, particularly in primary education. In Indonesian Islamic primary schools, English instruction is expected not only to improve students' linguistic competence but also to foster digital literacy, critical thinking, and Islamic values. This condition encourages the integration of multiliteracies pedagogy, which emphasizes the use of multimodal texts, digital tools, and culturally responsive learning practices. Multiliteracies-based instruction enables young learners to interact with language through videos, images, interactive applications, and collaborative activities that are more engaging and meaningful for digital-native students. Khasanah, et.al (2024) indicate that multiliteracies pedagogy supports students' communication skills, creativity, and intercultural understanding in English classrooms while addressing the demands of technology-oriented education.

In Islamic primary schools, however, English teaching still faces several challenges, such as limited digital learning models, inadequate integration of Islamic values into English materials, and teachers' lack of multiliteracies competence. Many English learning activities remain text-centered and less interactive, resulting in low student engagement and limited opportunities for meaningful communication. Sukmawati, et.al (2025) have highlighted the importance of integrating Islamic narratives, contextualized materials, and digital literacy into English instruction to strengthen both language mastery and character education among Muslim learners. Therefore, developing a digital multiliteracies-based English teaching model is considered essential to bridge the gap between technological advancement, language learning needs, and Islamic educational values. Such a model is expected to create innovative, interactive, and culturally relevant English learning experiences for students in Islamic primary schools.

Despite extensive research on digital multiliteracies in ELT, relatively little attention has been given to educational contexts where multimodal resources must be carefully adapted to comply with religious principles. Many existing models assume unrestricted access to audio-visual media, rendering them less applicable to Islamic schooling environments. This study addresses this gap by proposing a Digital Multiliteracies-Based English Teaching Model tailored to the needs and values of Islamic primary schools. Through an in-depth case study conducted at SD Al Mubarak Cendekia Islamic School, this research explores how multiliteracies pedagogy can be recontextualized to support English learning while reinforcing Islamic identity and moral education.

This study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do English teachers in Islamic primary schools adapt digital multiliteracies practices to align with Islamic educational norms and ethical constraints, particularly in contexts where music and anthropomorphic imagery are restricted? and (2) How does the implementation of a digital multiliteracies-based English teaching model influence students' engagement and communicative competence while reinforcing Islamic cultural and moral values?

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to allow for an in-depth exploration of instructional practices within their natural educational setting. The case study approach is

particularly suitable for investigating complex pedagogical phenomena shaped by contextual, cultural, and religious factors. By focusing on a single Islamic primary school, the research captures how digital English instruction is designed and enacted under specific ethical constraints.

The qualitative methodology enables the researcher to explore not only observable classroom practices but also teachers' pedagogical reasoning, beliefs, and reflections. This approach provides a holistic understanding of how digital multiliteracies pedagogy is interpreted and adapted in an Islamic educational environment.

The study was conducted at SD Al Mubarak Cendekia Islamic School, an institution that integrates academic learning with Islamic character education. Participants included two English teachers responsible for teaching Phase B and Phase C students, corresponding to learners aged eight to twelve years. In addition, forty-eight students across four classes participated through their involvement in classroom activities, and the school's curriculum coordinator contributed institutional and curricular perspectives. Participants were selected purposely because of their direct involvement in the design, implementation, and evaluation of digital English instruction. Their experiences and insights were therefore central to addressing the research questions.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations focused on technology-enhanced English lessons conducted without music or prohibited imagery, with particular attention to teacher instruction, student interaction, and the use of digital materials. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with English teachers and the curriculum coordinator to explore pedagogical intentions, challenges, and adaptive strategies in implementing digital multiliteracies. Document analysis involved the examination of lesson plans, digital instructional materials, and selected samples of student work to identify patterns of multiliteracies integration and alignment with Islamic values. The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach to allow for an in-depth and systematic examination of patterns emerging from multiple data sources. The analysis process was iterative and reflexive, enabling the researcher to move back and forth between the data, emerging codes, and theoretical constructs related to digital multiliteracies and culturally sustaining pedagogy. This approach was selected to capture both the explicit instructional practices observed in classrooms and the underlying pedagogical reasoning articulated by participants.

The first stage of analysis involved familiarization with the data. All observation notes, interview transcripts, and instructional documents were read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teaching practices and learning interactions under investigation. During this phase, preliminary notes were recorded to highlight recurring instructional features, teacher adaptations, and student response patterns related to the use of digital multiliteracies within Islamic ethical constraints.

In the second stage, initial coding was conducted using an inductive approach. Segments of data were coded based on their relevance to the research questions, particularly those reflecting pedagogical adaptation, multimodal resource design, learner engagement, communicative practices, and cultural-religious alignment. Codes were not predetermined but were generated from the data to ensure that the analysis remained grounded in participants' lived experiences and classroom realities. This inductive coding process allowed subtle yet significant pedagogical strategies to emerge, such as the strategic use of teacher narration and the reliance on symbolic visuals as alternatives to prohibited media.

The third stage involved organizing and refining the initial codes into broader thematic categories. Codes with conceptual similarities were clustered together to form overarching themes that represented recurring patterns across data sources. At this stage, constant comparison was employed to examine similarities and differences between classroom observations, interview accounts, and instructional documents. This process ensured that themes were not based on isolated instances but reflected consistent practices and perspectives across the dataset.

To enhance analytical rigor, the emerging themes were then examined in relation to existing theoretical frameworks, particularly multiliteracies theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy. This theoretically informed analysis enabled the researcher to interpret classroom practices not merely as isolated instructional techniques but as meaningful enactments of broader pedagogical principles. For instance, teachers' avoidance of music and anthropomorphic imagery was analyzed not simply as compliance with religious rules but as a deliberate redesign of multimodal meaning-making aligned with multiliteracies principles.

Throughout the analysis process, attention was also given to negative cases and variations in practice. Instances where students appeared less engaged or where instructional adaptations were less effective were examined to refine and nuance the interpretation of findings. This process contributed to a more balanced and credible analysis by acknowledging the complexity and variability inherent in classroom contexts.

To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was systematically applied by cross-referencing findings from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Convergences across data sources strengthened the validity of identified themes, while discrepancies prompted further analytical reflection. In addition, member checking was conducted informally by discussing preliminary interpretations with participating teachers to confirm the accuracy of representations and interpretations of their instructional practices.

Finally, the analysis culminated in the synthesis of themes that directly addressed the research questions and objectives of the study. These themes formed the basis for the presentation of results and subsequent discussion, allowing for a coherent narrative that linked empirical findings to theoretical insights. Through this rigorous and reflective data analysis process, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how digital multiliteracies pedagogy can be effectively adapted and enacted within Islamic primary school contexts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of a digital multiliteracies-based English teaching model in an Islamic primary school context required continuous pedagogical negotiation and creative instructional redesign. English teachers at SD Al Mubarak Cendekia Islamic School demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding Islamic ethical boundaries and actively restructured multimodal resources to ensure compliance with religious norms. Rather than perceiving these constraints as limitations, teachers reframed them as opportunities to develop alternative modes of meaning-making that remained pedagogically effective.

In classroom practice, teachers consistently avoided the use of music and anthropomorphic imagery by prioritizing symbolic representations, geometric visuals, silhouette-based images, and text-focused digital animations. Digital learning materials were deliberately curated so that meaning was conveyed through written language, motion graphics, spatial layout, and teacher narration. Videos were frequently presented without sound, allowing teachers to assume the role of narrators who guided students' attention, interpretation, and linguistic focus. This practice not only ensured ethical compliance but also increased teacher agency in shaping learning input.

Student engagement emerged as a prominent outcome of the model's implementation. Observational data revealed that students remained attentive and actively involved throughout digitally mediated lessons, despite the absence of musical or character-based stimuli commonly associated with young learner ELT. Students demonstrated enthusiasm when interacting with animated texts, responding to visual cues, and participating in kinesthetic activities coordinated with digital prompts. The integration of movement, gesture, and collaborative interaction appeared to compensate for the absence of auditory entertainment, suggesting that engagement was sustained through meaningful task design rather than sensory stimulation alone.

The development of communicative competence was also evident across observed lessons. Students showed gradual improvement in vocabulary retention, sentence production, and oral participation during guided narration and interactive tasks. Captioned texts and contextualized digital scenarios supported reading comprehension, while teacher-led narration provided linguistic modeling that facilitated oral expression. Importantly, students appeared less anxious when engaging in speaking activities, as multimodal scaffolding allowed them to rely on visual and contextual support rather than memorization or spontaneous production.

Cultural and religious alignment was consistently embedded in instructional practices. Teachers intentionally integrated Islamic concepts, moral values, and culturally familiar contexts into English lessons. Vocabulary items and narratives were framed within themes such as adab, responsibility, and respect, allowing English learning to function as an extension of character education. This alignment contributed to students' positive attitudes toward English, as the language was presented not as culturally foreign but as compatible with Islamic identity.

3.2 Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the ongoing discourse on multiliteracies pedagogy by demonstrating its flexibility and adaptability within religiously constrained educational environments. Traditional applications of multiliteracies in ELT often emphasize music, animated characters, and entertainment-oriented multimodal resources, particularly for young learners. However, the findings of this study challenge the assumption that such elements are indispensable for effective language learning. Instead, they illustrate that multimodality can be reconfigured through ethically acceptable modes such as text animation, narration, gesture, spatial organization, and symbolic visuals.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the multiliteracies framework by foregrounding the role of cultural and religious context in shaping pedagogical design. Meaning-making in the observed classrooms was not diminished by the absence of music or anthropomorphic imagery; rather, it was redistributed across alternative semiotic modes. This redistribution aligns with the core principle of multiliteracies, which emphasizes the dynamic orchestration of multiple modes rather than reliance on any single modality. The findings suggest that multiliteracies pedagogy is not inherently tied to specific media forms but can be meaningfully enacted through context-sensitive adaptation. The finding that meaning-making can be redistributed across alternative semiotic resources within culturally and religiously situated classrooms is supported by several previous studies on multiliteracies and multimodality. Ollerhead (2019) demonstrated that multilingual classrooms rely on translanguaging, gesture, visual arrangement, and interactional practices as alternative semiotic modes for meaning-making, rather than depending solely on conventional audiovisual materials. Likewise, Lim (2018) argued that multimodal literacy pedagogy should adapt to learners' sociocultural contexts and may employ various communicative modes beyond images and sound, emphasizing socially situated meaning-making processes. In addition, Khimmataliev, et.al (2024) found that multiliteracies practices can integrate religious values and culturally appropriate pedagogical designs while still fostering effective student engagement and literacy development.

Moreover, the study also provides empirical support for culturally sustaining pedagogy within Islamic education. By embedding Islamic values and moral narratives into English instruction, teachers positioned English as a communicative resource that complements, rather than competes with, students' religious identities. This approach mitigated potential cultural tension often associated with English as a global language and reduced the risk of identity dissonance among learners. As a result, English learning became an inclusive and affirming experience that reinforced students' sense of belonging within their religious and cultural community.

In terms of student engagement, the findings underscore the importance of pedagogical intentionality over sensory stimulation. Engagement was sustained not through entertainment-driven media but through interactive task design, teacher mediation, and meaningful learner participation. This challenges dominant assumptions in young learner ELT that equate engagement with musical or character-based input and suggests that cognitive, social, and physical involvement can be equally, if not more, effective.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the central role of teachers as designers and mediators of digital multiliteracies. Teachers' ability to reinterpret digital resources, provide narration, and scaffold interaction was crucial to the success of the model. This reinforces the view that digital pedagogy in constrained contexts requires not only technological access but also pedagogical expertise and reflective practice. Teacher professional development, therefore, becomes a key factor in the sustainable implementation of digital multiliteracies in Islamic schools.

Overall, the discussion reveals that the proposed digital multiliteracies-based English teaching model does more than address practical constraints; it offers a reconceptualization of how global pedagogical frameworks can be localized without sacrificing educational quality. By aligning multiliteracies pedagogy with Islamic ethical principles, the model contributes to a more inclusive understanding of digital ELT that acknowledges religious diversity as a legitimate and productive dimension of educational practice.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital multiliteracies can be effectively implemented in Islamic primary schools through a carefully designed pedagogical framework that respects religious and ethical principles. The proposed Digital Multiliteracies-Based English Teaching Model enhances student engagement, supports communicative competence, and reinforces Islamic identity without reliance on music or anthropomorphic imagery.

The findings suggest that Islamic schools do not need to reject digital innovation but can instead reinterpret multiliteracies pedagogy in culturally and ethically appropriate ways. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of this model on language proficiency and to explore its applicability across diverse Islamic educational contexts in Indonesia and beyond.

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