Research Article

Empowering Student Behavioral Engagement in Thai EFL Writing Classes through a Multimodal Project Approach: Insight from Students'Perspectives

Ataillah Calista Azalia*, and Cut Novita Srikandi

Faculty of Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia, 20238
*Corresponding Author: ataillahcalista123@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how a multimodal project approach empowers student behavioral engagement in Thai EFL writing classes, based on learners' perspectives. The research is grounded in the genre-based multimodal framework and guided by student engagement, focusing on peer interaction, teacher interaction, and content engagement. Using a quasi-experimental mixed-method design, 30 tenth-grade students at Islam Suksa Darulbir Satun School, Thailand, participated in a classroom action research intervention. Data collection involved surveys, classroom observations, multimodal writing products, and reflective responses. The intervention followed four stages: understanding multimodality, designing, revising drafts, and publishing with reflection. Results showed statistically significant increases in engagement across all domains ($p < 0.001$). Students demonstrated improved collaboration, responsiveness, and focus. Reflections highlighted greater confidence and enjoyment, especially when writing tasks connected with daily experiences and allowed creative visual expression. The study concludes that multimodal writing projects effectively enhance behavioral engagement by aligning learning with students' digital strengths and fostering autonomy. These insights offer practical direction for improving EFL writing instruction in similar educational contexts.

Keywords: Student; Behavioral Engagement; Thai EFL Writing; Multimodal; Project Approach; Student Perspectives;

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing skill plays a vital role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it supports learners' academic success (Aliyu, 2020). It serves as a fundamental academic tool to convey ideas, emotions, and thoughts in written form. People commonly share news or information through articles, newspapers, or short notes. Students, for instance, often express their thoughts in papers, journals, essays, or even diaries (Suastra & Menggo, 2020). Writing functions as a widely used form of communication, especially in the era of technology and globalization. Sending messages, emails, and sharing blogs becomes an effective way to communicate with people across cities, islands, and countries.

According to (Harmer, 2004), writing assignments allow students more time to think compared to spoken tasks, enabling them to reflect on their knowledge and utilize resources such as dictionaries or grammar guides. However, expressing opinions, feelings, or ideas through writing often presents challenges due to difficulties with sentence structure and word choice. As a result, many students perceive writing in English as difficult and unengaging, leading to diminished motivation. Overcoming these obstacles requires the creation of supportive learning environments that encourage student engagement and make writing more accessible. The classroom setting plays a crucial role in this process, as engagement levels vary significantly across different learning spaces (Cooper et al., 2018). Student interactions with peers, teachers, and learning content represent instructional factors that boost behavioral engagement (Nguyen et al., 2018). Supportive interpersonal climates developed through collaborative tasks among active learners are strongly correlated with increased engagement (Patrick et al., 2007). Additionally, strong teacher-student relationships enhance engagement by cultivating a trusting atmosphere and making writing more approachable.

In Thai EFL contexts, student engagement presents a significant challenge. Thai students tend to underperform compared to neighboring countries, primarily due to classroom disengagement (Srikandi, 2022). This issue is especially evident in writing classes, where instruction is often perceived as boring and teacher-centered, resulting in limited interaction (Stone, 2017). Resistance toward modern writing instruction is common in secondary education, where students frequently avoid writing due to a lack of direction (Nopmanotham, 2016). (Annab, 2015) found that students not only faced vocabulary and syntax difficulties but also lacked motivation to stay engaged. His study indicated a preference for writing tasks connected to students' real-life experiences. Addressing these issues requires teaching strategies that respond to learners' needs and promote active, meaningful participation (Pratumtong et al., 2021).

Various strategies have been explored to enhance writing engagement. One particularly effective method involves integrating technology and collaboration through multimodal projects (Yeh & Mitric, 2019). These projects utilize multiple communication modes—linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial—to construct and convey meaning (Jewitt, 2012). Multimodal products such as infographics, posters, or videos allow students to express ideas through visual storytelling (Selfe & Selfe, 2008). By engaging with diverse media, learners participate in a creative process that supports clarity and intentional communication. As a result, multimodal writing becomes more authentic, challenging, and engaging.

Integrating multimodal projects into writing instruction brings substantial benefits. These projects promote learner autonomy and combine enjoyment with cognitive challenge (Hafner, 2015). They also improve student engagement by encouraging interaction with project goals, audiences, and design elements (Krongyut & Srijongjai, 2023). (Arola et al., 2013) propose a sequenced framework to implement multimodal writing effectively: beginning with genre analysis, followed by project design, peer feedback, revision, and publication, ending with student reflection. This sequence fosters creativity, collaborative learning, and continuous improvement.

Further support for this approach comes from (Prasetyawati & Ardi, 2022) who reported increased student participation and peer collaboration through digital storytelling. (Trisanti et al., 2022) observed that teachers frequently use videos and podcasting tools, while others rely on slide-based media to deliver lessons. These digital tools have proven effective in enhancing motivation and comprehension. (Krongyut & Srijongjai, 2023) also examined student interactions and concluded that multimodal instruction boosts behavioral engagement in EFL writing.

The findings from these studies demonstrate that multimedia approaches not only increase motivation and participation, but also align writing tasks with students' realities. This emphasizes the need for ongoing teacher development and classroom support systems. More importantly, adapting teaching strategies to match learners' digital competencies transforms how writing is perceived and practiced. By fostering classrooms where students feel empowered to express themselves through multiple media, educators strengthen writing skills and language development. These insights offer a foundation for future research into long-term impacts and serve as a model for similar EFL contexts facing engagement challenges.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was designed using a mixed-method quasi-experimental approach to explore the impact of a multimodal   project approach on students' behavioral engagement in an EFL writing class at Islam Suksa Darulbir Satun School, Satun, Thailand, with a population of 112 tenth grade students and a sample of 30 students selected through purposive sampling based on low writing ability, as identified by the teacher (Cohen et al., 2020). This approach integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of engagement, in line with the recommendations of (Creswell & Clark, 2021). The study implemented classroom action research (CAR) in two intervention cycles to enable iteration and improvement of teaching practices, in line with the reflective model of (Kemmis et al, 2022). The aim was to investigate the improvement of students' behavioral engagement in three domains (peer interaction, teacher interaction, and content engagement) and explore students' perceptions through qualitative reflection, with practical recommendations for EFL teaching in the Thai context. The theoretical framework is based on the genre-based multimodal framework of (Arola et al., 2013), which emphasizes the iterative stages (ideation, designing, revising, reflecting), as well as the engagement theories of (Barkley & Major, 2020) and (Fredricks et al., 2023), which highlight the behavioral, emotional and cognitive dimensions of digital learning. The intervention was designed in four stages: introduction to multimodality, content designing, draft revision, and publication with reflection, to encourage student autonomy and creativity, in line with (Thomas, 2020) project-based learning theory.

Table 1. Instructional Sequence for Multimodal Project

Stages	Activities
Understanding & Analysis	Understanding multimodality and analyzing sample projects.
Designing	Designing project content and receiving feedback.
Draft & Revising	Drafting, revising, and peer reviewing digital posters.
Publish & Reflecting	Final projects shared, conducted self-assessments and reflected on their learning process.

Data sources included 30 tenth grade students as providers of survey and reflection data, classroom observations over four weeks to record engagement behaviors, student reflection documents to capture qualitative perceptions, multimodal project products (digital posters, video narratives) as creativity artifacts, as well as informal interviews with teachers and administrators for additional context. Data collection techniques included pre- and post-intervention surveys using a 19-item Likert scale questionnaire adapted from the BERI protocol (Lane & Harris, 2021), validated with Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.8$) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to ensure fit for the Thai context (Cohen et al., 2020). Classroom observations were conducted with checklists to record the percentage of students exhibiting behaviors such as listening, note-taking, and interacting, with inter-rater reliability (kappa ≥ 0.7). Student reflections were collected through an open-ended form in week four, designed based on (Braun & Clarke's, 2021) guidelines for in-depth responses. The multimodal project products were analyzed based on the design criteria of (Arola et al., 2013), such as visual quality and message clarity.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted with paired sample t-test on survey data to measure significant changes in engagement ($p < 0.05$), with Cohen's d (Cohen et al., 2020) to calculate effect sizes (small: d = 0.2, medium: d = 0.5, large: d ≥ 0.8). Observational data were analyzed descriptively to identify weekly patterns of engagement, visualized through graphs, according to the (Lane & Harris, 2015) model. Qualitative analysis of student reflections used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), through the stages of data familiarization, coding, theme development, review, theme naming, and reporting, with triangulation against survey and observation data for validity (Creswell & Clark, 2021). Data integration was conducted using convergent parallel design to combine quantitative (statistics of increased engagement) and qualitative (themes such as confidence and motivation) findings, linked to the theories of (Arola et al., 2013) and (Krongyut & Srijongjai, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Survey Questionnaires Result

The results of the pre- and post-survey questionnaires indicated that student behavioral engagement improved after the implementation of the multimodal project. The post-survey scores showed higher levels of attention, active participation, and interaction compared to the pre-survey. The paired sample t-test showed a significant increase, with a moderate to large effect size based on Cohen's d.

Table 2. Mean Comparison of Pre- and Post-Survey Engagement Scores

Domain	Pre Survey Mean	Post Survey Mean	Mean Increase	t-value	p-value
Peer Interaction	3.02	4.12	+1.10	5.37	<0.001
Teacher Interaction	2.89	4.06	+1.17	6.01	<0.001
Content Engagement	3.15	4.21	+1.06	5.88	<0.001

The pre- and post-survey data showed statistically significant improvements across three dimensions: peer interaction, teacher interaction, and content engagement. As shown in Table 2, post-intervention scores rose by over one point on the Likert scale for each category, with p-values below 0.001, indicating strong significance. This aligns with (Barkley & Major, 2020) definition of engagement as a product of motivation and active learning. The rise in peer interaction suggests that collaborative multimodal tasks—such as poster creation and group presentations—helped students overcome social barriers and contributed to higher levels of classroom participation.

Peer Interaction rose from a mean score of 3.02 to 4.12, suggesting that students became more collaborative and communicative during group activities and discussions. Teacher Interaction improved from 2.89 to 4.06, indicating that students were more responsive to instructor input and participated actively in classroom exchanges. Content Engagement increased from 3.15 to 4.21, which reflects heightened interest and attention toward writing tasks and learning materials. The p-values (< 0.001) across all domains confirm that these improvements are statistically significant. The use of multimodal tools—such as poster design, visual planning, and peer feedback—played a critical role in enhancing student motivation and interaction.

3.1.2 Observation Result

Classroom observations were conducted over four instructional weeks. The number of students demonstrating engaged behaviors was recorded and averaged per session.

Table 3. Percentage of Engaged Students by Behavior Type

Behaviour Type	Week 1(%)	Week 2(%)	Week 3(%)	Week 4(%)
Listening & Attention	68	75	81	89
Note Taking & Writing	62	70	83	91
Peer Interaction	57	71	85	93
Teacher Interaction	54	69	78	86
Content Engagement	61	74	82	88

Table 3 shows the percentage of students demonstrating engaged behaviors across four instructional weeks. The behaviors were recorded through observation and included categories like listening attentively, note-taking, and active participation.

The gradual increase in Listening & Attention (from 68% to 89%) suggests that students became more focused and mentally present throughout the lessons. Note-Taking & Writing improved markedly, reaching 91% in the final week— showing that students took ownership of their ideas and contributed thoughtfully. Peer Interaction peaked at 93%, indicating strong collaboration and peer support during project activities. Teacher Interaction and Content Engagement followed similar upward trends, affirming that the multimodal approach fostered a more inclusive and participatory classroom culture.

These behavioral changes show that when students are given meaningful, creative tasks with visual and digital components, they respond with increased attentiveness, effort, and collaboration.

3.1.3 Reflection Analysis

A qualitative analysis of student reflections, conducted using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021) revealed a number of key themes that reflected the positive impact of the multimodal project approach on students' behavioral engagement and perceptions in EFL writing classes. The majority of students reported increased confidence, enjoyment in the writing process, and appreciation of visual learning tools, such as digital posters and video narratives, which made the writing task feel more relevant and less daunting. The theme of confidence emerged consistently, with students noting that working with digital media allowed them to express ideas more creatively and freely, reducing the writing anxiety often experienced in EFL contexts. The theme of enjoyment indicated that multimodal activities, such as designing posters and collaborating in groups, changed students' perceptions of writing from a mechanical task to a fun and personally meaningful process, supporting findings (Juiboonmee, 2023) that Thai students are more engaged with tasks related to everyday experiences. In addition, students highlighted the importance of peer feedback, which facilitated collaborative discussions and strengthened the sense of community in the classroom, in line with social engagement theory (Fredricks et al., 2023).

Appreciation of visual creativity was also a prominent theme, with students noting that the use of digital tools made them more motivated to actively participate and experiment with their ideas. These reflections confirm the effectiveness of multimodal approaches in increasing emotional and cognitive engagement, as supported by (Krongyut & Srijongjai, 2024) who found that multimodal designs encourage more positive participation and collaboration. Triangulation with survey data and classroom observations validated these findings, showing that increased behavioral engagement (such as peer interaction and content engagement) aligned with changes in students' attitudes towards writing. Overall, student reflections indicated that the multimodal approach not only increased behavioral engagement, but also fostered intrinsic motivation and writing fluency, supporting a pedagogical model (Arola et al, 2013) that emphasizes process-based learning through digital storytelling and visual design.

3.2 Discussion

This study shows that a multimodal project approach can significantly increase student engagement in EFL writing classes in Thailand. This increase is seen in three main dimensions of engagement: interaction with peers, interaction with teachers, and engagement with content. These findings indicate that media-based and creativity-based teaching strategies provide real opportunities for students to be more active, confident, and participatory in classroom activities.The 93% increase in peer interaction by the fourth week demonstrates the effectiveness of the collaborative approach. (Patrick, Ryan, and Kaplan, 2007) explain that a supportive social environment fosters motivation and active participation. In this context, group activities such as creating digital posters and team discussions provide meaningful interaction opportunities. (Krongyut & Srijongjai, 2023) also note that students show increased engagement in writing activities when given the opportunity to collaborate on project design.

Student interaction with teachers increases significantly, as noted by Cooper et al., 2014), that active learning practices facilitated by teachers encourage engagement in large classes. In this study, teachers not only provide instructions but also act as mentors in the revision and reflection process of projects, in line with the reflective learning model by (Kemmis et al., 2022). The integration of visual and digital elements through posters and videos supports more expressive learning. (Jewitt, 2012) states that multimodality allows students to use various modes of communication to convey meaning more effectively. (Selfe & Selfe, 2008) add that the use of visual design in writing tasks gives students space to express ideas in a more personal style, which directly impacts their emotional engagement.

Quantitative data showed a significant increase based on t-tests and Cohen's d, while student reflections reinforced these results qualitatively. (Creswell & Clark , 2021) emphasize the importance of triangulation in mixed-method research to gain a deep and holistic understanding of the phenomenon of engagement. This study applied this method by combining surveys, observations, and reflections in parallel. Low writing motivation among Thai students has been reported by (Nopmanotham, 2016) and (Srikandi, 2022) indicating that rigid and irrelevant teaching methods are the main causes. (Pratumtong et al., 2021) recommend more contextual and real-life experience-based strategies to address these challenges. The results of this study show that multimodal projects can address these needs with a more flexible and student-centered approach.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that a multimodal project approach can significantly increase student engagement in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) writing classes in Thailand. By integrating visual design elements, collaborative work, and digital media such as posters and narrative videos, students become more active in the learning process and more confident and motivated to express themselves through writing. This approach successfully transforms the traditional perception of writing activities, which were previously seen as monotonous and boring, into a more enjoyable, interactive, and relevant experience aligned with students' real-life experiences.

From a quantitative perspective, increased engagement is reflected in pre- and post-intervention survey data, which show significant improvements in three key domains of engagement: interaction with peers, interaction with teachers, and engagement with lesson content. These findings are supported by statistical tests (paired sample t-test) showing high significance ($p < 0.001$) and a sufficiently large effect size. For example, teacher interaction scores increased from 2.89 to 4.06, while peer interaction scores rose from 3.02 to 4.12. This indicates that students became more responsive, communicative, and active during the learning process. From the classroom observation perspective, the percentage of students exhibiting active and engaged behavior—such as taking notes, listening attentively, and discussing with teachers and peers—continued to increase from the first to the fourth week. Peer interaction reached its highest level at 93% in the fourth week, indicating that the multimodal project approach fosters the creation of a strong learning community, where teamwork and communication serve as the foundational pillars.

Through qualitative reflection, students reported that the use of visual and digital tools helped them feel more confident and creative in expressing their ideas. Many of them also expressed that the writing process became more enjoyable and meaningful, especially when tasks were linked to personal experiences. Themes such as "learning comfort," "collaboration," and "intrinsic motivation" consistently emerged in student reflections, supporting the theory that emotional and social engagement is crucial in language learning.

Overall, the multimodal project approach not only improves writing skills but also strengthens students' overall engagement—encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects. These results provide a strong foundation for curriculum development in the EFL context, especially in educational environments facing engagement challenges such as in Thailand. The practical implications of these findings are the need for ongoing teacher training, the provision of adequate technological resources, and the implementation of methods aligned with students' digital literacy. As education shifts from a teacher-centered approach toward one that facilitates students' active and creative exploration, learning outcomes become more meaningful and sustainable. This approach can serve as a model for other institutions seeking to address student engagement challenges in EFL writing classes by adapting teaching methods to meet the needs of today's digital generation.

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