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Emotional Engagement with VAK-Informed Multimodal EFL Materials among Indonesian Senior High School Learners

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Abstract

Students' emotional engagement remains a persistent challenge in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where instruction is frequently dominated by teacher-centered approaches and textbook-based materials. This study aimed to explore how multimodal EFL materials informed by Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) learning principles shaped students' emotional engagement in an Indonesian senior high school. A qualitative case study was conducted at SMA Negeri 20 Gowa during the 2024/2025 academic year. Through purposive sampling, one Grade XI class (XI-B) was selected from approximately 180 students based on its relatively comparable English proficiency and learning characteristics. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, students' reflective journals, and classroom documentation and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five interconnected dimensions of emotional engagement: interest and enjoyment, confidence, motivation, active participation, and sense of belonging. Learning activities integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences created a more interactive and supportive classroom environment, encouraging

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students to participate more confidently and collaboratively. Students also perceived the learning process as more enjoyable, meaningful, and relevant than conventional instruction. These findings demonstrate that VAK-informed multimodal materials can support emotionally engaging and learner-centered EFL instruction by strengthening students' affective involvement, meaningful participation, and communicative interaction. This study contributes to the literature on emotional engagement and multimodal pedagogy by providing context-specific evidence from Indonesian secondary EFL education and offers practical implications for teachers designing inclusive instructional materials that accommodate diverse modes of learning.

Keywords: Emotional Engagement; EFL Materials; Multimodal Learning; Secondary School Learners; VAK Learning Principles

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of SMA Negeri 20 Gowa, Indonesia, English learning is designed to support students in developing their communicative abilities as part of their secondary education. Nevertheless, a considerable number of students still face challenges in using English with confidence, particularly when engaging in classroom communication activities. In daily classroom practices, some students tend to remain passive, rely on teacher explanations, and hesitate to express their ideas in English due to limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence. These conditions reflect broader challenges commonly found in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students often have limited exposure to meaningful English communication despite the increasing importance of English in academic, technological, and global contexts. English has become an essential means of communication in education, technology, and international collaboration, making English proficiency an important competency for students worldwide. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language from secondary education onward, yet many learners still struggle to use the language confidently in classroom communication. Despite curriculum reforms promoting learner-centered instruction, English lessons in many schools continue to rely heavily on textbooks, teacher explanations, and examination-oriented activities, leaving students with limited opportunities to participate actively or interact meaningfully in English (UNESCO, 2021; Tomlinson, 2023).

These instructional practices influence not only students' language development but also their emotional experiences during learning. Recent research increasingly recognizes that successful language learning depends on how learners feel while participating in classroom activities. Students who enjoy learning, feel confident, and perceive the classroom as supportive are generally more willing to communicate, collaborate with classmates, and persist when facing linguistic challenges (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Fredricks et al., 2023). In contrast, boredom, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes often discourage learners from using English, particularly in EFL classrooms where opportunities for authentic communication are limited (Dewaele & Li, 2021; Jiang & Dewaele, 2023). Consequently, fostering students' emotional engagement has become an important objective of contemporary language education.

One approach that has attracted increasing attention is multimodal learning, which integrates various forms of communication such as images, audio, videos, movement, discussion, and collaborative tasks within a single learning experience. Unlike conventional instruction that depends mainly on verbal explanation and printed texts, multimodal pedagogy enables students to process information through multiple sensory channels while actively constructing meaning (Mayer, 2021). Studies across different EFL contexts have shown that multimodal instruction promotes higher learner motivation, classroom interaction, and engagement because students experience learning as more authentic, interactive, and meaningful (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Rather than receiving information passively, learners become active participants who observe, discuss, create, and communicate throughout the learning process.

The multimodal materials examined in this study were originally developed using Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) learning principles. Although VAK has traditionally been associated with learning-style theory (Fleming & Mills, 1992; Dunn & Dunn, 1993), contemporary educational research no longer supports the assumption that instruction should be matched to students' preferred learning styles. Reviews by Pashler et al. (2008) and Newton and Salvi (2020) conclude that there is insufficient empirical evidence for the learning-style matching hypothesis. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that the practical value of VAK lies in encouraging teachers to design learning experiences that incorporate multiple modes of representation rather than relying on a single instructional approach (Mayer, 2021). In this study, therefore, VAK is viewed as a framework for developing multimodal EFL materials, not as a tool for categorizing learners.

Within multimodal learning, emotional engagement plays a central role because it reflects how students respond affectively to classroom experiences. Emotional engagement includes learners' feelings of enjoyment, interest, confidence, enthusiasm, and belonging during learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2023). These emotions influence students' willingness to communicate, interact with peers, and remain actively involved in classroom tasks (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Consequently, evaluating instructional materials should involve not only cognitive outcomes but also an examination of how students experience learning emotionally.

The importance of emotional engagement became evident during the preliminary implementation of multimodal EFL materials at SMA Negeri 20 Gowa, Indonesia. Although English is taught regularly, classroom observations indicated that learning was often dominated by teacher explanations and textbook exercises. Many students hesitated to answer questions or express ideas in English because they were afraid of making mistakes or being evaluated negatively by their classmates. During the implementation of multimodal learning activities including picture-based discussions, storytelling, role plays, educational games, videos, and collaborative projects, students gradually became more enthusiastic and interacted more actively with both their peers and the teacher. These classroom experiences suggested that multimodal instructional materials might contribute not only to language learning but also to students' emotional engagement.

Despite growing research on multimodal learning, relatively few studies have explored how secondary school students experience emotional engagement while learning through multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK principles, particularly in Indonesian schools. Existing research has largely concentrated on learning outcomes, instructional effectiveness, or teachers' perspectives, whereas students' own emotional experiences have received comparatively limited attention. Understanding these experiences is important because learners themselves provide valuable insights into how classroom practices influence their motivation, confidence, participation, and sense of belonging during English learning.

Therefore, this study explores how Indonesian secondary school students experience emotional engagement while learning through multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles. Drawing on classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom documents, the study seeks to explain how multimodal

instructional materials shape students' interest, confidence, motivation, participation, and classroom relationships. By reconceptualizing VAK as a foundation for multimodal instructional design rather than a learning-style theory, this research contributes to current discussions on learner engagement and offers practical insights for English teachers who seek to design more inclusive, interactive, and emotionally supportive EFL classrooms.

Multimodal Learning in EFL Education

The increasing complexity of English language education has encouraged a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward learner-centered approaches that position students as active participants in constructing knowledge. In contemporary EFL classrooms, language learning is no longer perceived merely as the acquisition of grammatical structures but as an interactive process involving communication, collaboration, and meaning-making through various forms of representation. Within this context, multimodal learning has gained considerable attention as an effective pedagogical approach that integrates visual, auditory, textual, digital, and kinesthetic resources to facilitate language development and student engagement (Mayer, 2021; Lim & Polio, 2020). By incorporating multiple modes of communication, multimodal instruction provides learners with richer opportunities to understand, interpret, and use English in meaningful contexts.

The theoretical foundation of multimodal learning is primarily connected to the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML), which explains that learners construct knowledge by processing information through interconnected verbal and visual channels (Mayer, 2021). Furthermore, multimodality theory emphasizes that meaning is created through the interaction of diverse semiotic resources, including language, images, sounds, gestures, and spatial elements (Jewitt et al., 2016). In EFL education, these perspectives encourage teachers to move beyond conventional textbook-based practices by incorporating videos, images, collaborative discussions, role plays, digital media, and other interactive activities. Previous studies have shown that multimodal instruction contributes positively to students' motivation, classroom participation, communicative competence, and willingness to use English by creating more authentic and engaging learning environments (Zhang & Zou, 2022; Lim & Polio, 2020; Tomlinson, 2023). Therefore, multimodal materials function not only as technological resources but also as pedagogical tools that connect cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions of language learning.

This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for the present study, particularly in examining how instructional materials influence students' emotional engagement in EFL classrooms. Although the materials investigated in this research were initially developed based on Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) principles, this study does not attempt to validate learning style theory. Instead, VAK is understood as a practical framework for designing multimodal learning experiences that incorporate various activities, resources, and communication modes. This approach is consistent with current educational perspectives that emphasize providing diverse learning opportunities for all students rather than matching instruction to fixed learning preferences (Newton & Salvi, 2020; Mayer, 2021). Accordingly, this study adopts multimodal learning as the primary theoretical perspective for exploring how multimodal EFL materials support students' emotional engagement in secondary school learning contexts.

From Learning Styles to Multimodal Learning

The concept of learning styles has influenced educational practices by emphasizing that learners may have different preferences in processing information. One widely recognized model is Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK), which suggests that learning can be supported through activities involving different sensory modes. In EFL contexts, VAK principles have encouraged teachers to use varied instructional activities, including visual aids, oral explanations, discussions, role plays, simulations, and hands-on experiences to create more engaging learning environments (Fleming & Mills, 1992; Dunn & Dunn, 1993). However, the validity of learning style theory has been questioned due to limited empirical evidence supporting the matching hypothesis, which claims that students learn better when instruction matches their preferred styles (Pashler et al., 2008; Newton & Salvi, 2020). Recent perspectives argue that learning is a complex and flexible process influenced by multiple cognitive, social, and emotional factors rather than fixed learner categories.

Consequently, contemporary researchers have shifted from viewing VAK as a framework for classifying learners toward understanding it as a foundation for multimodal learning design. The significance of VAK principles lies not in matching instruction to individual preferences but in encouraging the use of multiple modes of representation, including visual, auditory, textual, digital, and physical resources, to support learning for all students (Mayer, 2021; Jewitt et al., 2016). In EFL classrooms, multimodal instructional materials that combine images, videos, discussions, listening activities, role plays, and digital

resources can provide richer opportunities for interaction, participation, and meaningful language use. This approach aligns with learner-centered pedagogy, which emphasizes active engagement, communication, and inclusive learning experiences (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Tomlinson, 2023).

The shift from learning styles to multimodal learning also provides a stronger basis for examining students' emotional engagement in language learning. By offering diverse and interactive learning experiences, multimodal materials have the potential to enhance students' interest, confidence, enjoyment, and motivation. Therefore, rather than focusing on differences among learners' preferred styles, current research emphasizes how multimodal environments can support cognitive and emotional engagement for all learners. Based on this perspective, the present study views VAK principles as a pedagogical framework for developing multimodal EFL materials that encourage meaningful participation and emotionally supportive learning experiences.

Emotional Engagement in Foreign Language Learning

Emotional engagement is an important dimension of student engagement because it shapes how learners experience and participate in classroom activities. Unlike behavioral engagement, which focuses on observable actions, and cognitive engagement, which refers to students' mental efforts in learning, emotional engagement involves learners' feelings toward learning activities, teachers, peers, and the classroom environment (Fredricks et al., 2023). Positive emotional engagement includes enjoyment, interest, confidence, enthusiasm, and belonging, while negative emotions such as anxiety, boredom, and frustration may reduce learners' participation and motivation (Pekrun, 2021). In EFL contexts, emotional engagement is particularly important because students often experience anxiety related to language accuracy, pronunciation, and peer evaluation, which can influence their willingness to communicate (Dewaele & Li, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that positive emotions contribute to students' motivation, participation, confidence, and language development. Foreign language enjoyment, for example, has been linked to stronger willingness to communicate and greater classroom involvement (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2022; Jiang & Dewaele, 2023). This perspective is supported by Positive Psychology, which emphasizes that positive emotions enhance attention, creativity, and social interaction during learning (MacIntyre et al., 2021). Furthermore, instructional materials play a significant role in shaping students' emotional

experiences. Materials that encourage curiosity, authentic communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy can strengthen emotional engagement in language learning (Tomlinson, 2023; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). In multimodal EFL classrooms, the integration of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities may provide meaningful experiences that increase students' enjoyment, confidence, and motivation.

Based on these perspectives, the present study conceptualizes emotional engagement as students' emotional experiences while learning through multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK principles. The study focuses on how students experience interest, enjoyment, confidence, motivation, and classroom connectedness during multimodal learning activities. Understanding these experiences is essential because students' emotional responses reveal how instructional materials influence participation and involvement beyond academic outcomes. Therefore, this study contributes to the discussion of emotional engagement in creating more meaningful, inclusive, and learner-centered EFL classrooms.

Multimodal EFL Materials and Students' Emotional Engagement

Instructional materials play an important role in shaping students' learning experiences in EFL classrooms. Beyond supporting language development, effective materials should promote learners' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement (Tomlinson, 2023). Multimodal EFL materials support this process by integrating various modes of representation, such as images, audio, videos, texts, and interactive activities, which provide learners with richer opportunities to engage with language and classroom experiences (Mayer, 2021). Compared with conventional materials, multimodal resources encourage more active participation and meaningful communication.

Research shows that multimodal materials can strengthen students' emotional engagement by creating enjoyable, interactive, and supportive learning environments. The integration of visual, auditory, and experiential activities can enhance learners' motivation, confidence, interest, and willingness to communicate (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020). Activities such as role plays, collaborative tasks, and multimedia-based projects also support students' participation and sustained involvement in language learning (Fredricks et al., 2023). In this study, VAK principles are used as a framework for developing multimodal materials that provide diverse learning experiences rather than as a method for classifying learners' fixed learning styles. This perspective reflects current views of multimodal pedagogy that emphasize multiple ways of engaging all learners (Newton & Salvi, 2020; Mayer, 2021).

Although research on multimodal learning continues to grow, limited studies have explored students' emotional experiences with multimodal EFL materials, particularly in Indonesian secondary schools. Previous research has focused more on learning outcomes and instructional effectiveness, while learners' emotional responses remain underexplored. Therefore, this study investigates how Indonesian secondary school students experience emotional engagement while using multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK principles, contributing to a deeper understanding of learner-centered English language instruction.

Indonesian Secondary School Context

English has become an important component of Indonesian secondary education as students are expected to develop communicative abilities for global interaction and twenty-first-century demands. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum promotes learner-centered education by emphasizing critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and meaningful learning rather than memorization-based practices (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Zein et al., 2020). Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to implement innovative teaching approaches and materials that provide students with opportunities to use English actively and contextually.

Despite these educational reforms, many Indonesian secondary schools still experience challenges in implementing communicative English instruction. Classroom practices often remain dominated by textbooks, grammar exercises, and teacher-led activities, which limit students' opportunities to interact using English (Zein et al., 2020). Such conditions may reduce learners' motivation, confidence, and emotional involvement in the learning process (Dewi et al., 2022). Recent studies suggest that multimodal instructional materials can address these challenges by combining visual, auditory, digital, and collaborative activities to create more engaging learning experiences that enhance students' motivation, participation, and willingness to communicate (Indriani & Nur, 2023; Sulistyo et al., 2024). However, previous research has focused mainly on learning outcomes and instructional effectiveness, while students' emotional experiences in multimodal EFL learning remain less explored.

Therefore, Indonesian secondary schools provide a relevant context for investigating how multimodal EFL materials based on VAK learning principles contribute to students' emotional engagement. Examining learners' perspectives can reveal how multimodal

activities influence their interest, enjoyment, confidence, motivation, and classroom participation. This investigation is expected to support the development of learner-centered English instruction that not only improves language learning but also promotes students' positive emotional experiences in Indonesian secondary education.

Research Gap and Research Contribution

Although research has confirmed the benefits of multimodal learning, previous studies have mainly focused on language achievement, motivation, communicative competence, and instructional effectiveness (Lim & Polio, 2020; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Similarly, studies on emotional engagement in EFL contexts have emphasized teacher support, classroom environment, and instructional strategies rather than students' emotional experiences with multimodal materials (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Dewaele & Li, 2021). Therefore, limited attention has been given to how learners experience multimodal EFL materials developed from Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (VAK) principles, particularly through qualitative perspectives.

In Indonesian EFL contexts, research has largely examined instructional effectiveness, curriculum implementation, and academic achievement, while students' emotional experiences remain insufficiently explored (Zein et al., 2020). Few studies have investigated how multimodal materials influence learners' interest, enjoyment, confidence, motivation, and classroom connection, especially at the secondary school level. Considering the important role of emotional engagement in students' participation and persistence, further qualitative investigation is needed.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring students' emotional engagement with multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles in an Indonesian secondary school. VAK is viewed not as a learning-style classification but as a framework for designing meaningful multimodal learning experiences. Through a qualitative approach, this study examines students' perspectives on how multimodal activities shape their emotional engagement and contribute to learner-centered EFL instruction. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research question: How do Indonesian secondary school students experience emotional engagement while learning through multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore students' emotional engagement with multimodal EFL materials based on VAK principles. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand students' experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses rather than measure learning outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Using a single-case study design, this research examined the implementation of multimodal EFL materials in an Indonesian secondary school context (Yin, 2018). The study focused on how multimodal learning experiences influenced students' interest, confidence, motivation, and participation, supported by data from classroom observations, interviews, and instructional documents.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 20 Gowa, Indonesia, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The research population consisted of approximately 180 eleventh-grade students enrolled in six parallel classes. Using purposive sampling, one class (Grade XI-B) was selected as the research participants because students in this class demonstrated relatively similar English proficiency levels and had experienced learning using the multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles throughout the instructional program. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to select information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into their learning experiences (Patton, 2015).

The participants consisted of 30 students from Grade XI-B who actively participated in the learning activities during the research period. In addition, the English teacher who implemented the instructional materials participated as a key informant to provide contextual information regarding lesson implementation and classroom interactions. Including both students and the teacher enabled the researcher to obtain multiple perspectives regarding the learning process and strengthened the credibility of the findings through data triangulation.

Instruments, Data Collection, and Trustworthiness

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to explore students' emotional engagement with multimodal EFL

materials. Classroom observations focused on students' participation, interactions, and emotional responses, including enthusiasm, confidence, enjoyment, collaboration, and persistence during learning activities.

Semi-structured interviews with selected students and the English teacher were conducted after the learning program to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of multimodal learning activities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Document analysis of lesson plans, instructional materials, students' worksheets, journals, photographs, and learning products was used to support data triangulation. The credibility and rigor of the study were enhanced through methodological triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement, following contemporary qualitative research procedures recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Creswell and Creswell (2023).

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021). First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, while classroom observation notes and relevant documents were organized systematically. Second, the researcher repeatedly read the data to gain familiarity with participants' experiences before generating initial codes representing meaningful units related to emotional engagement. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories to identify emerging themes describing students' emotional experiences during multimodal English learning.

The preliminary themes were subsequently reviewed, refined, and compared across different data sources to ensure consistency and credibility. The final themes represented students' shared experiences concerning their emotional engagement with the multimodal EFL materials, including expressions of interest, enjoyment, confidence, motivation, active participation, and classroom connectedness. Throughout the analysis process, interpretations were continuously compared with classroom observations and documentary evidence to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Rather than relying solely on software-generated coding, the researcher conducted an interpretive analysis to preserve the contextual richness and authenticity of participants' voices, enabling a deeper understanding of how multimodal instructional materials influenced students' emotional engagement in the Indonesian secondary school EFL classroom.

RESULTS

The findings are organized into five interconnected themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and instructional documents. The themes illustrate how students emotionally experienced the multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles. Data triangulation across these three sources strengthened the credibility of the findings and provided a comprehensive understanding of students' emotional engagement during English learning.

Theme 1: Interest and Enjoyment through Multimodal Learning Experiences

Interview Data

One of the strongest themes emerging from the interviews was students' increased sense of interest and enjoyment while learning English through multimodal instructional materials. Most participants explained that English lessons became more enjoyable because the learning activities combined videos, pictures, games, group discussions, movement-based activities, and classroom interaction rather than relying solely on textbooks or teacher explanations. Students described the lessons as "more interesting," "not boring," and "easier to follow" because they were actively involved throughout the learning process.

One participant explained:

Extract 1

"I enjoyed the lesson because we didn't just read the textbook. We watched videos, discussed with our friends, and completed different activities. It made English easier and more enjoyable to learn." (Student 07, Interview)

Another participant similarly stated:

Extract 2

"The learning activities were fun because we could move around, discuss ideas, and learn through pictures and videos. I never felt sleepy during the lesson." (Student 12, Interview)

These responses indicate that students perceived multimodal learning as more engaging than conventional classroom instruction. The variety of learning activities maintained their attention and created positive emotional experiences that increased their willingness to participate throughout the lesson.

Observation Data

The classroom observations consistently supported the interview findings. Throughout the implementation of the multimodal EFL materials, students demonstrated high levels of behavioral and emotional engagement. They actively participated in discussions, responded enthusiastically to teachers' questions, volunteered to complete classroom activities, and collaborated with peers during group tasks.

Students frequently smiled, laughed, and encouraged one another while completing visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning activities. Unlike previous teacher-centered lessons, very few students appeared distracted or disengaged. During video-based discussions and role-play activities, almost all students remained attentive and contributed ideas to their groups, indicating sustained emotional involvement in the learning process.

Interpretation

The triangulated findings suggest that multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles successfully fostered students' interest and enjoyment, which represent important dimensions of emotional engagement. Rather than passively receiving information, students became emotionally involved because the learning activities were interactive, varied, and meaningful. The combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences created a positive classroom atmosphere where students perceived English learning as enjoyable rather than intimidating. These findings indicate that students' positive emotional responses were not simply generated by the novelty of instructional materials but by the opportunities to actively participate, collaborate with peers, and experience English learning through multiple modes of communication. Such emotionally engaging learning environments encourage learners to sustain attention, participate more actively, and develop more positive attitudes toward English learning.

Theme 2: Developing Confidence and Willingness to Participate through Multimodal EFL Materials

Interview Data

Many students reported that the multimodal EFL materials increased their confidence to participate in English lessons. The combination of videos, pictures, group discussions, and interactive activities helped reduce their fear of making mistakes and encouraged them to express their ideas more freely.

Extract 3

"At first, I was afraid of speaking English, but after joining the activities, I became more confident to answer questions and share my ideas." (Student 09, Interview)

Another student explained:

Extract 4

"The pictures and videos helped me understand the lesson better, so I felt more confident to participate in class." (Student 15, Interview)

Observation Data

Classroom observations showed that students became more active as the lessons progressed. More students volunteered to answer questions, participated in discussions, and presented their work confidently. Students who were initially quiet gradually became more willing to communicate during classroom activities.

Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles fostered students' confidence and willingness to participate in English learning. The varied learning activities created a supportive classroom environment where students felt more comfortable expressing their ideas and engaging in classroom interaction.

Theme 3: Enhancing Motivation through Multimodal Learning Activities

Interview Data

Another theme emerging from the interviews was students' increased motivation to learn English through multimodal EFL materials. Students explained that the variety of learning activities, including videos, pictures, games, and collaborative tasks, made the lessons more enjoyable and encouraged them to participate actively.

Extract 5

"The activities were different from our usual English lessons. They made me excited to come to class and learn English." (Student 05, Interview)

Extract 6

"I liked learning through videos and group activities because they made the lesson interesting and motivated me to participate." (Student 18, Interview)

Observation Data

The classroom observations showed that students maintained a high level of enthusiasm throughout the lessons. They participated actively in group discussions, completed learning tasks enthusiastically, and showed sustained attention during multimodal activities.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that the multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles enhanced students' motivation by creating enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. The integration of various learning modes encouraged students to participate more actively and maintain positive attitudes toward learning English.

Theme 4: Promoting Active Participation through Collaborative Multimodal Learning

Interview Data

Students reported that the multimodal EFL materials encouraged them to participate more actively during classroom learning. Collaborative activities such as group discussions, role plays, and problem-solving tasks provided opportunities for students to exchange ideas, ask questions, and support one another while learning English.

Extract 7

"Working in groups made me feel more comfortable speaking English because my friends helped me when I had difficulties." (Student 11, Interview)

Extract 8

"The group activities encouraged everyone to participate. We shared ideas and learned from each other." (Student 20, Interview)

Observation Data

Classroom observations showed that students interacted actively during multimodal learning activities. Most students contributed to group discussions, responded to their classmates' opinions, and worked collaboratively to complete learning tasks. The classroom atmosphere was lively, with students demonstrating positive interaction and mutual support. The findings suggest that multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles promoted active participation by creating collaborative learning opportunities.

Through interactive group activities, students became more engaged in classroom discussions, communicated more confidently, and developed stronger social connections during English learning.

Theme 5: Fostering a Sense of Belonging through Multimodal EFL Learning

Interview Data

Many students expressed that the multimodal EFL materials created a more supportive and enjoyable classroom environment. They felt accepted by their peers, were more comfortable working together, and were not afraid to make mistakes during English learning activities.

Extract 9

"I felt more comfortable learning English because my classmates supported each other during the activities. We learned together without being afraid of making mistakes." (Student 14, Interview)

Extract 10

"The group activities made our class feel closer. We helped each other and enjoyed learning English together." (Student 22, Interview)

Observation Data

Classroom observations showed positive interactions among students throughout the learning process. They actively supported one another during discussions, shared ideas respectfully, and encouraged their peers when completing group tasks. The classroom atmosphere appeared friendly, cooperative, and emotionally supportive.

The findings indicate that the multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles fostered students' sense of belonging by creating a collaborative and emotionally supportive learning environment. Positive peer interaction and cooperative learning encouraged students to feel more connected to the classroom community, contributing to stronger emotional engagement throughout the English learning process.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how Indonesian secondary school students emotionally engaged with multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles. The findings

revealed five interconnected dimensions of emotional engagement, namely students' interest and enjoyment, confidence, motivation, active participation, and sense of belonging. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that multimodal instructional materials not only supported language learning but also created positive emotional experiences that encouraged students to become more actively involved in English learning.

The first finding indicates that multimodal EFL materials successfully enhanced students' interest and enjoyment during English lessons. Students described the learning activities as enjoyable because they incorporated videos, pictures, games, collaborative tasks, and movement-based activities instead of relying solely on conventional textbook instruction. These findings support Fredricks et al. (2023), who argue that emotional engagement is reflected in students' positive feelings toward learning activities, including enjoyment, curiosity, and enthusiasm. Similarly, Pekrun's (2021) Control-Value Theory explains that students experience positive emotions when learning activities are perceived as meaningful, interesting, and achievable. The integration of multiple learning modes enabled students to experience English learning in more authentic and enjoyable ways, thereby increasing their emotional involvement throughout the learning process. These findings are also consistent with Zhang and Zou (2022), who found that multimodal instruction enhances learners' engagement by stimulating multiple sensory channels simultaneously and creating richer learning experiences.

The second finding demonstrates that multimodal learning contributed to students' confidence and willingness to participate in classroom activities. Students reported feeling less anxious when expressing ideas because learning tasks were completed collaboratively through discussions, role plays, and interactive activities. The combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic resources provided additional support that helped students understand lesson content before participating in communicative tasks. These findings reinforce Mercer and Dörnyei's (2020) argument that emotionally supportive learning environments encourage learners to participate more actively by strengthening their self-confidence and reducing communication anxiety. Likewise, Dewaele and Li (2021) found that enjoyable classroom experiences significantly reduce foreign language anxiety while increasing students' willingness to communicate. The present study suggests that multimodal instructional materials function not only as cognitive learning resources but also as affective support that enables students to participate more confidently during English learning.

Another important finding concerns students' motivation to learn English. The participants consistently reported that multimodal learning activities maintained their curiosity and encouraged them to participate actively throughout the lessons. Rather than perceiving English as a difficult or monotonous subject, students viewed classroom learning as interesting because they experienced different learning activities that accommodated diverse ways of learning. This finding aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which proposes that meaningful, engaging, and autonomy-supportive learning environments enhance learners' intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Similarly, recent studies have shown that multimodal learning environments improve students' learning motivation by increasing relevance, authenticity, and enjoyment during classroom instruction (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Zhang & Zou, 2022). Therefore, the present findings suggest that multimodal instructional materials provide meaningful learning experiences that strengthen students' emotional investment in English learning.

The findings also revealed that multimodal EFL materials promoted active participation through collaborative learning activities. Students became more involved in classroom discussions, group tasks, role plays, and presentations because learning activities encouraged interaction and shared responsibility among classmates. This finding supports sociocultural perspectives of language learning, which emphasize that meaningful learning occurs through social interaction and collaborative knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978). Recent EFL research similarly indicates that collaborative multimodal learning increases students' classroom participation and communicative interaction because learners feel psychologically supported by their peers (Sato & Lara, 2022). In this study, collaborative multimodal activities reduced students' hesitation to participate, allowing them to exchange ideas more freely and contribute actively during English lessons.

The final finding highlights the importance of sense of belonging in fostering emotional engagement. Students perceived the classroom as more supportive because collaborative multimodal activities encouraged cooperation, mutual assistance, and positive peer relationships. As students worked together to complete learning tasks, they developed stronger interpersonal connections and felt more comfortable expressing themselves in English. This finding is consistent with Fredricks et al. (2023), who emphasize that emotional engagement is closely associated with students' feelings of connectedness, acceptance, and belonging within the classroom community. Likewise, Mercer (2020) argues that positive classroom relationships strengthen learners' emotional well-being, which subsequently

promotes greater engagement and persistence in language learning. The present findings therefore suggest that emotional engagement extends beyond individual motivation and confidence to include students' social and emotional experiences within collaborative learning environments.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of multimodal EFL materials lies not in matching instruction to fixed learning-style categories but in providing diverse learning experiences that accommodate multiple ways of engaging with language. Contemporary educational research has increasingly questioned the empirical validity of learning-style matching while supporting multimodal instructional design as a means of enhancing learning experiences (Newton & Salvi, 2020). Consistent with this perspective, the present study reconceptualizes VAK learning principles as a practical framework for designing multimodal instructional materials rather than as a tool for classifying learners. The positive emotional engagement observed among students appears to result from the richness, flexibility, and interactivity of multimodal learning experiences instead of the alignment between instructional methods and presumed learning-style preferences.

Research Implications

This study contributes to the growing literature on multimodal pedagogy by providing qualitative evidence of students' emotional experiences in Indonesian secondary school EFL classrooms. While previous studies have primarily focused on learning achievement, motivation, or instructional effectiveness, the present study demonstrates that multimodal instructional materials also influence how students feel during learning. Understanding these emotional dimensions is particularly important because positive emotional engagement encourages learners to participate actively, communicate confidently, and sustain their motivation throughout the language learning process. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that English teachers should move beyond textbook-centered instruction by integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning experiences that foster emotionally supportive classrooms. Such learning environments not only facilitate language acquisition but also promote students' confidence, enjoyment, motivation, participation, and sense of belonging, all of which are essential for meaningful and sustainable English language learning.

Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite these contributions, this study was limited to one purposively selected class in a single secondary school, which may limit the transferability of the findings. Future research is recommended to investigate multimodal EFL materials across different educational contexts using larger samples, longitudinal designs, or mixed-methods approaches. Further studies could also examine the relationships between emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and language achievement to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning experiences in multimodal EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study explored Indonesian secondary school students' emotional engagement with multimodal EFL materials developed from VAK learning principles. The findings revealed that the instructional materials positively influenced students' emotional engagement through five interconnected dimensions: interest and enjoyment, confidence, motivation, active participation, and sense of belonging. The integration of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning experiences created an engaging and supportive classroom environment that encouraged students to participate more actively and confidently during English lessons.

The findings further suggest that the educational value of VAK learning principles lies not in matching instruction to fixed learning styles but in informing the design of multimodal instructional materials that accommodate diverse learning experiences. By integrating visual resources, listening activities, collaborative discussions, and movement-based tasks, the instructional materials promoted meaningful interaction and positive emotional experiences that strengthened students' willingness to communicate and participate in English learning.

This study contributes to the growing literature on multimodal pedagogy and emotional engagement by providing qualitative evidence from the Indonesian secondary school EFL context. The findings highlight that emotionally engaging learning environments are essential not only for improving classroom participation but also for fostering students' confidence, motivation, and positive attitudes toward English learning. These results underscore the importance of designing learner-centered instructional materials that

integrate multiple modes of learning to support both students' emotional well-being and language development.

Future research is recommended to investigate multimodal EFL materials across different educational contexts using larger samples, longitudinal designs, or mixed-methods approaches. Further studies could also examine the relationships between emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, behavioral engagement, and language achievement to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' learning experiences in multimodal EFL classrooms.

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