

Exploring students' experiences and perceptions in adapting folk tales into picture books within multiliteracies pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Although folk tales are central to the nation's cultural heritage, their potential in English language education is often overlooked due to the dominance of traditional literacy practices and limited multimodal learning. Implementing multiliteracies pedagogy also remains underexplored. This study explores how adapting folk tales into English-language picture books within a multiliteracies framework can enrich university-level EFL pedagogy. Moving beyond translation, this approach encourages students to critically reflect on cultural narratives while expressing them creatively through multimodal design. The project involved thirty-six seventh-semester students in a Literature in ELT course. It was structured around the four pedagogical stages of the multiliteracies framework: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice. Using a qualitative content analysis design, researchers collected data through classroom observations, field notes, group discussions, student projects, and interviews. Findings show that students critically engage with folk tales' sociocultural, moral, and symbolic dimensions. They reinterpreted these stories for new audiences, balancing creative adaptation with cultural authenticity. This process enhanced their multimodal composition skills, textual analysis, and audience awareness while strengthening their confidence and voice as future educators. The study highlights the value of integrating folk tales and multimodal practices in EFL settings to promote critical thinking, intercultural competence, and pedagogical creativity. Students showed a greater sense of identity formation through the project, emphasizing the transformative impact of culturally responsive, student-centered pedagogies. This study recommends future research to explore applying student-generated picture books in a real classroom with supporting pedagogical variables to evaluate their impact on long-term literacy development.

Keywords: EFL; folk tales; multiliteracies pedagogy; multimodal; picture book

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INTRODUCTION

Folk tales remain vital to moral education and cultural transmission, especially among younger generations, due to their adaptability across historical periods, cultural contexts, and media (Yusuf, 2022). Deeply rooted in Indonesia's oral and literary traditions, these stories often carry symbolic, historical, and political meanings. However, for today's learners, the messages may feel unrelatable or difficult to grasp. Thus, they must understand the folk tale's storyline to internalize its moral values.

Adapting folk tales into English-language picture books presents an innovative pedagogical opportunity in university-level EFL courses. This approach goes beyond translation but challenges students to reflect critically and engage creatively with culture and language. However, literacy development in Indonesian higher education remains hindered by persistent challenges (Hidayat et al., 2024). Students often struggle with decoding English texts, feel disconnected from cultural content, and are taught through rote methods that discourage higher-order thinking (Fuentes & Gago, 2024; Zipes, 2012). Despite the rise of digital tools and books, students still face barriers in accessing and meaningfully using these resources (Furwana et al., 2025). These issues require more culturally grounded and multimodal learning strategies (Mandarani & Megawati, 2024).

Multiliteracies pedagogy, introduced by the New London Group (2000), responds to this need by fostering meaning-making through multiple modes. It positions students as active knowledge designers capable of integrating texts with broader social contexts (Cope et al., 2017). Multimodal storytelling, as one such practice, enables learners to reinterpret and reconstruct folk tales while bridging traditional narratives with contemporary realities (Johnson, 2025). What has not been explored is how learning through multiliteracies can help students understand texts multimodally, enhancing their critical thinking and cultural awareness through literary stories.

Existing studies reveal related progress yet highlight this gap. Mandarani and Megawati (2024) showed how novel-based narratives adapted into oral performances helped students develop multimodal competence through voice, facial expressions, and gestures. However, their study did not address visual transformation or student-created picture books. Novita et al. (2024) demonstrated that folk tales enhanced narrative writing when paired with visual aids but did not explore students' multimodal creations. Similarly, Safitri (2023) emphasized the role of folktales in promoting critical thinking and imagination, yet the application of these cognitive gains through visual storytelling remains unexamined. These findings suggest that integrating folk tales and multiliteracies, particularly through student-generated picture books, remains underexplored.

This study addresses that gap by examining how multiliteracies pedagogy supports the adaptation of Indonesian folk tales into picture books using multimodal strategies, and how students perceive this creative process as a form of cultural exploration in language learning. Specifically, it examines how seventh-semester students in a Literature in ELT course experienced the four pedagogical stages—Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice. Through this framework, students deepened their engagement with cultural meaning and cultivated language skills, multimodal awareness, and reflective creativity as future educators (Mandarani et al., 2024; Mandarani & Megawati, 2024). To guide this inquiry, the following research questions are posed:

1. How did the lecturer enact multiliteracies pedagogy in guiding the adaptation of folk tales into picture books?
2. How did students perceive the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy during the adaptation process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Folk tales and picture books

Folk tales hold increasing pedagogical relevance as educators shift toward multimodal learning approaches emphasizing visual literacy, cultural depth, and critical engagement. These traditional narratives passed down orally through generations are rich in symbolic meaning and cultural identity (Zipes, 2012). In the EFL context, folk tales offer authentic language input and familiar cultural themes that support linguistic and intercultural learning (Sayeef, 2019). Studies proved that folk tales

potentially promote critical thinking, creativity, and imagination through thematic and moral exploration, primarily when supported by structured strategies such as pre-reading, vocabulary scaffolding, and post-reading discussion (Hasby et al., 2025; Nazneen & Alizia, 2024; Pricilia & Rahmansyah, 2022; Safitri, 2023).

Recent perspectives in literacy education highlight the need to align reading practices with students' sociocultural experiences and the visual-textual complexity of modern communication. Shen and Huang (2021) argued that reading is a semiotic process shaped by cultural background and visual understanding. Consequently, educators are encouraged to integrate texts that bridge verbal and visual modes, mainly through carefully selected picture books that reflect diverse narratives and lived experiences (Stewart & Koopmans, 2025).

Picture books, as multimodal texts, offer a blend of linguistic and visual storytelling that can enhance vocabulary development, interpretive thinking, and narrative structure comprehension (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). They are increasingly used in teacher education to develop future educators' multimodal literacy skills. However, most classroom picture books are teacher- or publisher-produced, with limited focus on student-generated adaptations, especially of traditional oral texts.

In Indonesia, folk tales like *Malin Kundang* and *Timun Mas* are deeply embedded in multilingual, culturally diverse environments. Damayanti and Febrianti (2020) and Papadopoulos and Shin (2021) showed that these narratives support cultural engagement, persuasive language development, and identity affirmation within EFL classrooms. However, these studies examine existing Indonesian popular folk tales that are chosen independently. There is a notable absence of research exploring how students transform oral narratives into multimodal texts, such as picture books. This gap is significant, as student-generated adaptations engage learners in language practice and the design of meaning through visual and symbolic choices; skills central to the multiliteracies pedagogy (New London Group, 2000; Novita et al., 2024).

Multiliteracies pedagogy

Multiliteracies pedagogy, introduced by the New London Group (2000), expands literacy beyond traditional reading and writing to encompass multiple modes of communication. This broader framework is particularly relevant for adapting culturally embedded texts like folk tales, as it enables identity positioning, cultural negotiation, and genre transformation. It encourages students to make meaning through multiple semiotic resources, fostering flexible communication skills and responsive teaching practices. This shift from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction aims to co-create meaning in language teacher education.

Each component of multiliteracies pedagogy directly supports this process. Situated Practice involved students engaging with familiar local narratives, grounding their learning in personal cultural experience and oral storytelling traditions. An approach supported by Takeuchi (2015) highlights valuing students' cultural and multimodal resources, which enhances participation and meaning-making. Overt Instruction involves teaching specific multimodal skills such as narrative pacing, layout design, and digital illustration essential for composing picture books. Critical Framing enables students to analyze how cultural values, gender norms, or moral lessons are conveyed in folk tales, reflecting the argument of Safitri (2023) that folk tales are tools for critical reflection. Transformed Practice involves students redesigning oral narratives into multimodal picture books, enhancing language and digital literacy, and strengthening identity (Amgott, 2020; Johnson, 2025; Thakur, 2022). While Misa (2023) and Nabhan and Habók (2025) highlight how multiliteracies promote analytical thinking and teacher competence, their work does not explore how students create original visual texts grounded in local traditions. This study addresses that gap by examining how student-constructed picture books are language learning and identity formation tools. It is supported by studies that have proved that such experiences cultivate intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and inclusive pedagogy—core competencies for future educators (Hasby et al., 2025; Stewart & Koopmans, 2025; Teng, 2023).

METHOD

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine how students applied multiliteracies pedagogy when adapting folk tales into picture books (Mayring, 2022). The data included student-generated picture books, written reflections, and transcripts from group discussions. Content analysis was chosen for its ability to interpret textual and visual elements, making it suitable for exploring students' use of multimodal resources, cultural perspectives, and identity development as future educators.

The participants were 36 seventh-semester students from a Literature in ELT course at a university in East Java, Indonesia. They were selected through purposive sampling as they had no experience with multiliteracies instruction but were preparing to become English teachers. All had completed prerequisite subjects such as Structure and Reading, enabling them to engage with multimodal texts and complex classroom tasks.

Data were collected over two months, from November to December 2024, through classroom observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of student-produced picture books. Non-participant observations recorded group work and interactions with multimodal resources, while field notes captured instructional strategies and students' interpretations during the adaptation process. Ethical research practices were followed throughout the project: participants gave informed consent, their anonymity and confidentiality were protected, and care was taken to respect their intellectual and cultural property. Given the researcher's dual role as lecturer, particular attention was paid to minimizing power imbalances to ensure students felt free to express their views honestly.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven students who had consistently participated throughout all stages of the multiliteracies project. Due to the length of the project, some students missed key sessions or submitted similar folk tale titles with minimal variation. The selected participants showed greater visual, narrative, and cultural variation, offering rich insights into their adaptation strategies and learning experiences. The selected tales included: *Calon Arang* (Student 1), *Si Pitung* (Student 2), *Danau Toba* (Student 3), *Timun Mas* (Student 4), *The Legend of Surabaya* (Student 5), *Keong Mas* (Student 6), and *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih* (Student 7).

One researcher, who also acted as the course lecturer, observed and documented student engagement throughout the project. To address potential bias, data from interviews, reflections, and visual artifacts were triangulated and analyzed systematically to ensure interpretations were grounded in students' own words and multimodal outputs. Data analysis was conducted alongside data collection to preserve contextual understanding. It followed four steps: 1) Identifying key phrases: Interview transcripts, reflections, and field notes were coded line-by-line to extract language related to multiliteracies. For instance, "combining text and images" or "cultural meaning." 2) Thematic categorization: Codes were grouped under the four components of multiliteracies pedagogy and additional themes like digital challenges or identity negotiation. 3) Tracing learning progression: The connections between themes were explored to understand how students progressed from cultural exploration to multimodal production. 4) Triangulating findings: To strengthen validity, the study used methodological triangulation by comparing data from student reflections and group discussions, classroom observations and field notes, and the final picture book products. Insights from these sources were interpreted holistically and supported by relevant theoretical literature on multiliteracies and cultural adaptation (Miles et al., 2016; Saldaña, 2016).

FINDINGS

This section presents findings according to the two research questions. The first subsection presents how students enacted multiliteracies pedagogy through four stages: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice. The second subsection explores students' perceptions of the adaptation process and its implementation.

Situated practice: Exploring cultural texts

In the first stage, Situated Practice, students activated their cultural and experiential knowledge. The lecturer introduced *Calon Arang*, an unfamiliar Balinese folk tale to most students, through a picture book and digital resources (e.g., YouTube videos and online articles). Students engaged with the text by retelling it in their own words, which helped them internalize its narrative elements and connect more deeply with its meaning.

During class discussions, students explored the spiritual and cultural significance of the tale. Student 1 commented, “*I never thought about the spiritual side of Calon Arang until we talked about it in class. It’s more than just magic. It reflects how people in Bali see life and death.*” They linked the tale’s mystical aspects to Balinese performance traditions like *wayang* and dance, recognizing the story’s role in preserving cultural memory.

Figure 1 displays an excerpt from a student’s storyboard of *Calon Arang*, showing how students collaboratively analyzed symbolism and emotional meaning. They deepened their understanding of narrative tension and moral complexity through re-enactments and storytelling.

Figure 1

A picture book of Calon Arang

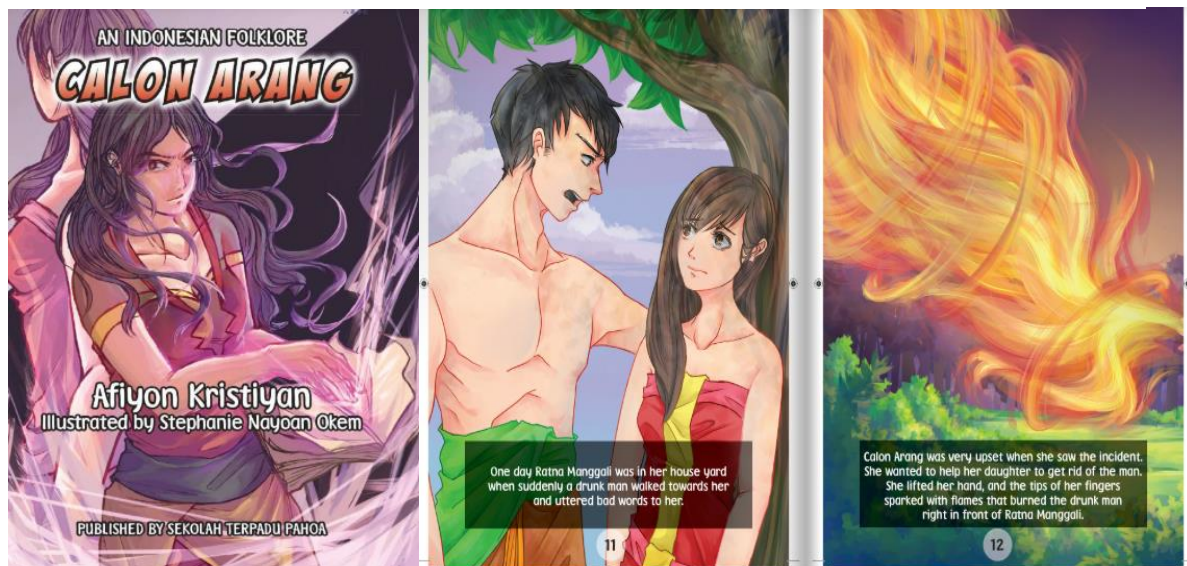


Figure 1 illustrates how students reimagined the traditional Balinese tale using anime-inspired visual language, which reflects their engagement with popular youth aesthetics. The characters are rendered with expressive facial features, dynamic gestures, and vibrant colors, signaling an attempt to make the narrative more relatable to contemporary readers. By portraying the confrontation between Ratna Manggali and the drunk man, followed by *Calon Arang*’s supernatural intervention, the students connect deeply with the story’s themes of protection, justice, and female agency. This visual retelling shows how students activated prior cultural knowledge and extended it through reinterpretation, blending local folk tales with globalized visual styles to convey emotional and moral complexity.

Overt instruction: Developing multimodal awareness

In the Overt Instruction stage, students analyzed how text and images interact to convey meaning. Using published picture books, the lecturer introduced techniques such as color symbolism, layout structure, and visual composition. They applied multimodal principles by examining character motivations, visual-emotional tone, and the values embedded in narratives.

As students began designing their adaptations, they made visual choices. As Student 2, who adapted *Si Pitung*, used bold colors and heroic postures to depict resistance and courage (see Figure 2). Student 2 explained, “*I drew Pitung as confident and bold, like a superhero, to show that he stood up for people.*”

In this adaptation, the student artistically portrays the protagonist with bold lines, a confident expression, and a dynamic posture, clearly situating him as a courageous and morally upright figure and depicts traditional Betawi attire and a historical village background, grounding the visual narrative in its cultural context, enhancing the authenticity and educational value of the book. Using bright primary colors—particularly red, blue, and gold—invokes strength, justice, and nobility, symbolizing *Pitung*'s resistance against colonial oppression.

Figure 2

A picture book of Si Pitung

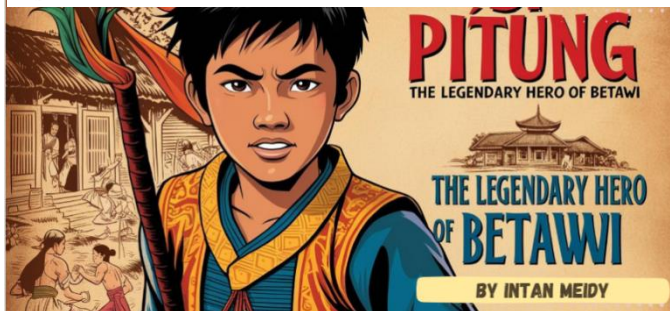


Figure 2 demonstrates his growing awareness of how visual composition, color symbolism, and cultural references communicate moral alignment and character identity. Through this guided design process, students illustrated the story and internalized the role of visual rhetoric in shaping audience interpretation.

Critical framing: Reflecting on cultural representation

In this stage, students critically reflected on how their visual and textual choices shape cultural interpretation and values, as shown in the adaptation of *Danau Toba* (Figure 3). The lecturer guided them to revisit their adaptations and ask key questions about cultural accuracy, interpretation, and visual framing. Student 3, who adapted *Danau Toba*, expressed concern about representation: “I didn’t want to misrepresent the Batak culture, so I looked for images of traditional clothes and houses from North Sumatra.” This student places the narrative within a recognizable North Sumatran context, featuring a lush landscape, a lake, and traditional attire to localize the story’s setting.

Figure 3

A picture book of Danau Toba



The dialogue balloons in Figure 3 also introduced an emotional and ethical tension between curiosity and respect, encouraging young readers to consider the consequences of their actions. By critically discussing how visual design choices can amplify or shift a story’s cultural significance, students begin to understand how adaptation requires ethical sensitivity. Some students decided to

stay close to original tales, while others reimagined settings and characters. These differing approaches prompted discussions about balancing authenticity with creativity as an essential critical literacy component.

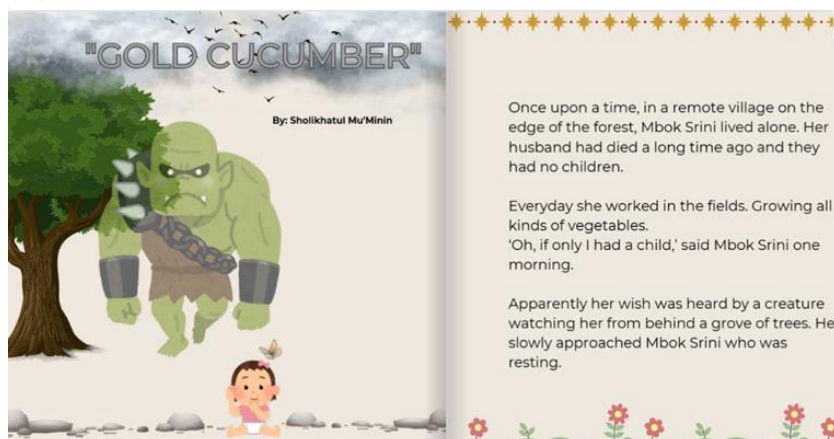
Transformed practice: Creating and presenting multimodal texts

In the final stage, Transformed Practice, students applied their understanding by producing their picture books based on their selected folk tales. Most of them selected the story based on their childhood memory, such as *Timun Mas* (Golden Cucumber), *Danau Toba* (Toba Lake), *Si Pitung*, The Legend of Surabaya, *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih* (The Shallot and Garlic), *Keong Mas* (The Golden Snail), and *Malin Kundang*. The lecturer encouraged them to move beyond literal retellings and instead offer new interpretations or highlight underexplored aspects of the stories. They also tried to modernize the traditional tales visually.

Student 4, who adapted *Timun Mas*, explained that drawing the antagonist as a muscular green giant holding a spiked weapon, they could visually amplify the tension in the story. In Figure 4, the visual interpretation made the character more memorable for young readers and deepened the story's moral dimension, reinforcing the values of courage and resistance.

Figure 4

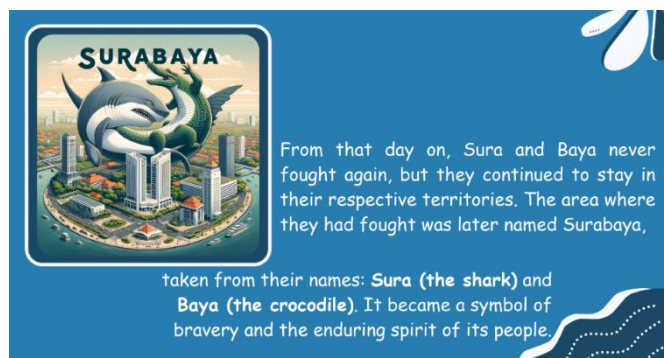
A picture book of Timun Mas



Moreover, Student 5, who adapted The Legend of Surabaya, repositioned the story within a contemporary urban setting. The student included the city's iconic shark and crocodile monument to connect the folk narrative with Surabaya's modern identity. This creative choice anchored the tale in a recognizable visual context, helping readers understand how traditional myths continue to shape local culture.

Figure 5

A picture Book of The Legend of Surabaya



Afterward, Student 6 presents *Keong Mas* through a modernized lens, as in Figure 6. The student illustrated the princess's character in casual clothing and placed her in an urban setting. This visual setting is updated to resemble urban life, making the story more accessible to today's readers. The blending of modern and traditional aesthetics demonstrated the student's ability to reframe the narrative without losing its essence.

Figure 6

A picture book of Keong Mas

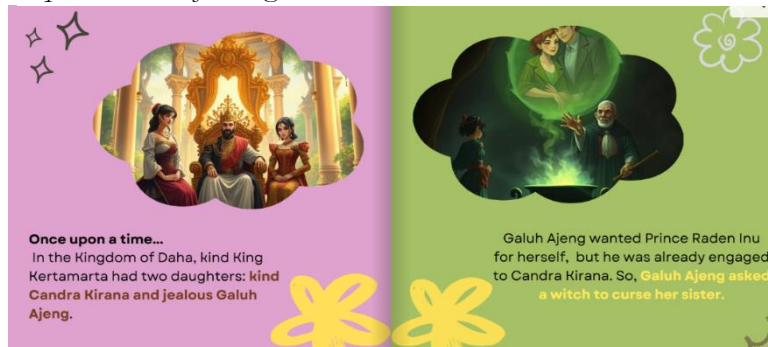
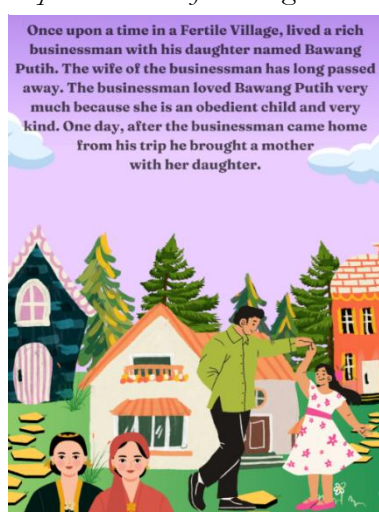


Figure 7 depicts a scene from *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih*, showing that traditional values can remain relevant in contemporary life. Student 7 highlighted how traditional values remain relevant in current social contexts. The shift periods reflected an intentional design strategy to connect past wisdom with present realities.

Figure 7

A picture Book of Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih



Across all adaptations, students demonstrated an ability to make purposeful design decisions. They reflected critically on how visual and linguistic choices influence meaning-making. Student 6 stated, "I wanted the story to feel real for today's kids, so I changed the setting to something familiar but kept the traditional clothes." It demonstrates students' ability to integrate cultural, textual, and visual elements into a coherent multimodal text. They also recognized storytelling as a performative cultural act. Student 7 shared, "We realized that folk tales live not only in books, but in dances, songs, and how people tell them repeatedly." They explored moral ambiguity and emotional depth through gestures, facial expressions, and performance-based storytelling. These embodied practices supported critical framing and highlighted how multiliteracies pedagogy engages students ethically and culturally.

Students' perceptions of the multiliteracies-based adaptation process

Students expressed that the project was intellectually stimulating and personally meaningful. Many reported gaining a deeper appreciation for Indonesian folk tales and feeling more motivated to learn. Student 7, who adapted *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih*, reflected, “*These processes helped me appreciate the deeper meaning of folk tales while enhancing my drawing, writing, and critical thinking.*” This reflection highlights how the project fostered artistic and linguistic development and analytical engagement. The process prompted them to evaluate cultural representation, narrative structure, and audience impact.

Besides that, students selected folk tales that resonated with their personal, moral, or regional identities. For instance, Student 4 selected *Timun Mas* for its national popularity and ethical themes: “*I chose Timun Mas because it is the most well-known and teaches values like courage and faith.*” Similarly, Student 2 picked *Si Pitung* to highlight Jakarta’s local heroism: “*He’s part of our local history, like a Robin Hood,*” explained Student 2.

Before designing their books, students conducted textual analyses to understand story structure, character development, setting, and intended audience. They reported carefully aligning their visuals with the text to ensure consistency. When asked whether they analyzed their stories before drawing, Student 5 responded, “*Yes. We can’t just start drawing without understanding the story deeply.*” This process also includes determining the target audience and tailoring language and visuals to young readers.

Despite their enthusiasm, they faced challenges in visualizing the characters’ personalities. Student 6, who worked on *Keong Mas*, admitted, “*The biggest challenge was visually representing the distinct personalities of folk tale characters. Illustrators must effectively translate each character’s personality and roles into visual form.*” This difficulty prompted Student 3, adapting *Danau Toba*, to research visual styles across cultures: “*I looked for relevant visual references for the characters. If the character is a princess, I looked at images of princesses from various cultural backgrounds and historical periods.*” These efforts reflect their awareness of cultural sensitivity and desire to present folk tale characters authentically and engagingly.

Most also emphasized the importance of visualizing cultural symbols and traditional elements. For instance, Student 1 illustrated the protagonist in traditional Javanese attire like *kebaya* and placed her home in a *joglo* house to reflect Javanese heritage. These visual choices represented their efforts to preserve cultural authenticity while engaging young readers meaningfully.

These reflections show that students perceived the multiliteracies-based adaptation project as a meaningful opportunity to explore how language, culture, and design intersect. Integrating textual analyses, visual composition, and cultural reflection encouraged them to think critically about narrative choices and audience impact. Throughout the four pedagogical stages, this project became a space for students to explore their cultural identities and develop pedagogical insight. As future educators, they valued how the project helped them navigate the complexities of storytelling, representation, and multimodal learning.

DISCUSSION

Implementing multiliteracies pedagogy in this project unfolded through the four interrelated stages that operated as an evolving cycle of engagement in which students moved from culturally grounded storytelling to the strategic creation of multimodal texts. Aligning with students’ perception, each stage contributed to their development as meaning-makers, illustrators, and reflective educators.

Situated Practice activated students’ prior knowledge and cultural experiences, enabling them to build narrative empathy and connect personally with Indonesian folk tales. This personal engagement deepened comprehension and allowed them to interpret the stories. For example, the student who adapted *Timun Mas* highlighted its popularity and strong moral values such as truth and kindness. This cultural proximity facilitated comprehension and enhanced engagement plus scaffolding, reinforcing that storytelling grounded in personal and community identity supports deeper learning (Mills, 2011; Sang, 2017). As Safitri emphasized, the imagination and cultural reflection stimulated at this stage promote creative expression and critical thinking (Safitri, 2023), while Huang found that multimodal engagement helps students uncover unspoken meanings (Huang, 2015). In this context, folk tales serve as content and culturally resonant tools for identity formation and motivation (Cummins, 2006).

During Overt Instruction, the lecturer facilitated students to design cohesive visual and textual narratives. They exercised substantial autonomy by conducting their textual analyses and making strategic decisions about visually interpreting plot structure, character development, and narrative sequencing. This self-directed approach highlighted their ability to align multimodal elements with intended meanings. For instance, Student 5 responded, “*starting the process by identifying target audiences and developing visual concepts, ensuring coherence between illustrations and text.*” This stage demonstrates how scaffolding can empower students’ autonomy in crafting meaning (Ratri et al., 2021; Sipe, 1998). Lee et al. (2019) further supported it by emphasizing that learner-driver constructing multimodal meaning fosters critical thinking and digital literacy. In this way, students acted as meaning-makers capable of orchestrating various semiotic resources with intentionality and creativity.

The Critical Framing stage is marked as a turning point in students’ interpretative depth. They examined how cultural narratives are encoded through visual symbols, attire, architecture, and character expression. Student 7, who adapted *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih*, depicted the protagonist in traditional Javanese attire and placed her in a *joglo*-styled house, signaling cultural fidelity. Student 4 also reflected on the difficulty of illustrating a character from Keong Mas, highlighting challenges in conveying personality traits visually. These moments show students negotiating the balance between honoring cultural authenticity and applying creative interpretation. As Ommundsen et al. (2022) noted, critical reflection increases motivation and interpretive depth, while Setiartin et al. noted that visual tasks enhance cultural awareness and sustained learning (Setiartin et al., 2024). However, this stage also surfaced tensions: students had to confront difficult questions, whether visualizing folk heroes in idealized ways risked oversimplification or whether incorporating modern visual aesthetics diluted traditional meanings. These challenges underscore the role of this stage not only in cultivating sensitivity to representation but also in prompting ethical and aesthetic decision-making.

In the Transformed Practice stage, students reimaged folk tales as illustrated books for younger audiences. They adapted key plot elements but reinterpreted them using simplified language, vibrant color schemes, and culturally embedded imagery. Student 3, for example, drew on historical references to design culturally appropriate character visuals, showing strategic thinking in design. Though the plots remained intact, this stage involved what can be described as “transformative fidelity”: maintaining narrative essence while innovating through form and delivery. It reflects Kim’s argument that digital and multimodal literacy is about rethinking how stories function across contexts (Kim, 2023). Genre adaptation in this stage leads to pedagogical and creative growth (Setiartin et al., 2024). Collectively, students viewed this adaptation project as an opportunity to preserve and creatively reinterpret traditional stories. Mastellotto stated that picture books nurture empathy and democratic values (Mastellotto, 2023). This creative re-authoring of folk tales allowed students to produce what Cummins terms “identity text” as works that reflect and affirm students’ cultural identities while supporting academic engagement (Cummins, 2006). The pedagogy promoted transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997), enabling them to re-evaluate traditional narratives through a critical, culturally responsive lens. Despite some struggles translating abstract emotions or symbolism into visuals, the process encouraged them to solve problems, reflect, and refine their work. These practices developed their analytical and evaluative skills, as they had to examine texts from multiple perspectives before producing a multimodal version (Christanti & Munir, 2023; Hasby et al., 2025; Pricilia & Rahmansyah, 2022). Stec supported that engaging in multimodal projects enhances students’ ability to analyze and interpret complex concepts critically, thereby deepening their understanding and fostering higher-order thinking skills (Stec, 2017).

Further, students also improved engagement and motivation due to the creative freedom and collaborative environment. Student 5 responded that the project was an engaging and insightful experience that enhanced their artistic and cultural awareness. These responses affirm an argument of Nurhasanah that multiliteracies pedagogy integrates 21st-century competencies by combining reading, writing, speaking, and digital skills (Nurhasanah, 2022). Students’ feedback supports findings by Hasan and Hasan that incorporating student voice boosts belonging and confidence (Hasan & Hasan, 2019).

They did not merely complete an assignment—they crafted visual stories that reflected their identities and cultural values.

These findings echo prior research on multiliteracies pedagogy, demonstrating its potential to blend academic rigor with personal and cultural relevance (Mills, 2008; Nabhan & Habók, 2025). Arizpe and Styles added that creative storytelling activities help students explore emotions and identity (Arizpe & Styles, 2016). Students were encouraged to collaborate, think critically, and consider visual-textual elements throughout these stages. Visual literacy is essential in society and the modern workplace (Widiastuti & Syamsi, 2023). Thus, these experiences strengthened their ability to communicate ideas, appreciate cultural heritage, and take ownership of their learning.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating a multiliteracies framework into adapting folk tales fosters academic and transformative learning in the EFL context. By engaging university students in the creative and critical reimagining of culturally resonant narratives, the project enhances their multiliteracies competencies—including textual analysis, multimodal design, and audience awareness—while producing student-generated works that reflect their cultural identities. This student-centered, culturally responsive approach offers a meaningful alternative to conventional language instruction, especially where students bring diverse cultural and digital backgrounds. Its transformative potential lies in its dual focus: fostering critical engagement with textual-visual connections and supporting identity development as future educators. It also prepares students for the communicative demands of 21st-century literacy, which is increasingly multimodal and intercultural. However, the study's scope was limited to a single course in one university with a relatively small sample size, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. The specific institutional and curricular setting may have influenced how students engaged with the pedagogy, meaning the outcomes may differ in schools with different resources, student populations, or instructional cultures. These limitations suggest that while the project offers valuable insights into how folk tale adaptation can foster multiliteracies, further studies are needed to explore its implementation in more diverse contexts. It includes incorporating digital tools, teacher training, and assessment practices to further evaluate its long-term pedagogical impact.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare there is no conflict of interest in this article.

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