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Digital Literacy Practices and Identity Negotiation among Thai Students in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: Advancing SDG 4 through Quality and Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To investigate how Thai students in Indonesia negotiate their identities through digital literacy practices in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, contributing to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) by examining how digital practices support quality and inclusive education in multilingual higher education contexts. **Method:** Employing a qualitative approach, the study involved three Thai students from the English Education Department at Universitas K.H. Abdul Chalim. Data were collected through classroom observations and self-administered interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. **Result:** The findings indicate that digital literacy practices facilitated language learning, classroom participation, and identity negotiation as international EFL learners. The participants utilized digital tools, including translation applications, social media, online learning platforms, and artificial intelligence tools, to adapt to academic and sociocultural environments. Their identity construction was shaped by cross-cultural experiences, multilingual communication, and digital engagement within the EFL classroom. **Novelty:** The study contributes to the growing literature by demonstrating the interconnected role of digital literacy and identity construction among international students in higher education EFL contexts. It also provides novel insights from the underexplored context of Thai students studying in Indonesia, highlighting how digital literacy practices support both academic adaptation and identity development.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital technology has become an inseparable part of English language learning, particularly in higher education contexts. The rapid development of digital platforms, social media, online translation tools, and artificial intelligence applications has transformed the ways students learn, communicate, and construct their identities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Digital literacy is no longer limited to the ability to access information, but also involves the capacity to interact, communicate, and participate in digital environments critically and meaningfully. Within EFL contexts, digital literacy practices influence not only students' language learning experiences but also the ways they perceive and negotiate their identities as language learners (Le Ha, 2009a, 2009b; Shahrehabaki, 2018; Varghese et al., 2005).

Identity construction has become an important issue in language education studies because language learning is closely connected with social interaction, culture, and self-representation. Identity refers to how individuals understand their relationship with the world and how they position themselves across time and space. In EFL classrooms, students continuously negotiate their identities through communication practices, classroom participation, and interaction with peers and teachers. This process becomes more complex for international students who must adapt to different linguistic, academic, and sociocultural environments (Bith-Melander et al., 2010; Perry, 2012; Wooyoung, 2025).

Previous studies have discussed digital literacy and identity in language learning from various perspectives. Several researchers found that digital literacy practices support students' participation and autonomy in language learning (Avsheniuk et al., 2023). Other studies also revealed that multilingual learners often construct hybrid identities through online interaction and digital communication (Adara, 2024; Hamzah et al., 2020; Khoso et al., 2026; Mucundanyi & Woodley, 2021; Wiwitan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the increasing use of artificial intelligence tools, translation applications, and social media platforms has provided EFL students with alternative ways to access information, improve language skills, and maintain intercultural communication (Danbolt, 2011; Le Ha, 2009; Martin et al., 2020).

Despite the growing number of studies on digital literacy and identity construction, research focusing on international students in Indonesian Islamic higher education contexts remains limited. Most previous studies mainly investigate local students or focus only on technological aspects of digital literacy without exploring how digital practices influence students' identity negotiation in EFL classrooms. In particular, Thai students studying in Indonesia experience unique cross-cultural and multilingual situations that may shape their learning identities differently from local students. As international students, they are required to adapt not only to academic demands but also to linguistic and sociocultural differences within the Indonesian educational environment.

At Universitas K.H. Abdul Chalim, Thai students in the English Education Department actively engage with various digital technologies in their daily learning activities. They use translation applications, online learning platforms, social media, and artificial intelligence tools to support classroom participation and communication. These digital literacy practices potentially influence how they negotiate their identities as EFL learners, international students, and multilingual individuals. However, little attention has been given to understanding how such identity construction occurs through their digital engagement in EFL classrooms. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Thai students negotiate their identities through digital literacy practices in EFL classrooms. Specifically, this study investigates the experiences of three Thai students in using digital technologies for English language learning and examines how these practices shape their identities within academic and sociocultural contexts. This study is expected to contribute to the growing discussion of identity construction and digital literacy in EFL education, particularly within international and multicultural higher education settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how Thai students negotiate their identities through digital literacy practices in EFL classrooms. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding participants' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions within their natural learning context (Elo et al., 2014; Morgan, 2022; Seixas et al., 2018; Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). The case study approach enabled the researcher to investigate the phenomenon in depth by concentrating on a specific group of participants in a particular educational setting. The participants of this study were three Thai students from the English Education Department at Universitas K.H. Abdul Chalim. The participants were selected purposively because they were international students who actively participated in EFL classroom activities and frequently used digital technologies in their learning

processes (Campbell et al., 2020; Etikan, 2016). Although the number of participants was limited, the study emphasized in-depth exploration and rich descriptions of participants' experiences rather than broad generalization, which is consistent with qualitative case study research. The study focused on their experiences in using digital literacy practices such as translation applications, online learning platforms, social media, and artificial intelligence tools during English language learning activities.

The data were collected through classroom observations and self-administered interviews (Chauhan, 2022; Curasi, 2001; Ernberg & Mac Giolla, 2023; Janghorban et al., 2014; Lobe & Morgan, 2021; Oliffe et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2009). Classroom observations were conducted over four weeks with two observation sessions each week during EFL classes. Each observation session lasted approximately 90 minutes and took place in regular classroom settings at the university. The observations aimed to identify participants' interactions, classroom participation, communication patterns, and the use of digital technologies during learning activities. Field notes were used to document important classroom situations, students' responses, and digital literacy practices observed during the lessons.

In addition, self-administered interviews were conducted to obtain deeper information regarding participants' experiences, perceptions, and identity negotiation processes in the EFL classroom context. The interview framework consisted of open-ended questions related to participants' experiences in using digital technologies, challenges in adapting to Indonesian academic and sociocultural environments, communication experiences in multilingual settings, and perceptions of identity as international EFL learners. The interviews allowed participants to express their thoughts and experiences more freely in written form.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Gofe et al., 2022; Kasturi et al., 2002; Lester et al., 2020; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The analysis began with organizing and familiarizing the data from observations and interviews. The researcher then identified initial codes related to identity construction and digital literacy practices. After that, the codes were categorized into broader themes based on recurring patterns found in the data. Finally, the themes were interpreted to understand how digital literacy practices contributed to the participants' identity negotiation in EFL classrooms. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied data triangulation by comparing the findings obtained from classroom observations and self-administered interviews. In addition, member checking was conducted by asking the participants to review several interview interpretations to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that the participants negotiated and constructed their identities through various digital literacy practices within EFL classroom activities. Based on classroom observations and self-administered interviews, the data revealed that digital technologies became important mediational tools that supported language learning, classroom participation, intercultural adaptation, and multilingual communication. The thematic analysis generated four major themes: (1) digital tools as academic and linguistic support, (2) multilingual identity negotiation in EFL classrooms,

(3) digital participation and the development of classroom confidence, and (4) intercultural adaptation through digital communication practices.

Digital tools as academic and linguistic support

Table 1. Themes of digital literacy practices and identity negotiation

No.	Themes	Findings
1	Digital Tools as Academic Support	Participants used translation applications, grammar-checking platforms, online dictionaries, and AI tools to understand classroom materials and complete assignments.
2	Digital Literacy as Learning Strategy	Participants selectively utilized different digital platforms based on classroom situations and linguistic needs.
3	Identity Negotiation Through Digital Engagement	Digital practices helped participants adapt to multilingual and cross-cultural classroom environments as international EFL learners.

The findings revealed that digital technologies functioned not only as learning tools but also as important mediational resources that shaped participants' academic adaptation and identity negotiation in EFL classrooms. Classroom observations showed that all participants consistently used smartphones or laptops during learning activities. However, the use of digital technologies was not merely technical or habitual. Instead, the participants strategically employed translation applications, online dictionaries, grammar-checking platforms, and artificial intelligence tools to compensate for linguistic limitations and maintain classroom participation. This indicates that digital literacy practices became adaptive strategies that enabled the participants to negotiate academic challenges within multilingual classroom environments.

The observation data further demonstrated that participants frequently experienced difficulties understanding academic vocabulary, lecturers' explanations, and classroom discussions conducted in English and Indonesian. Rather than remaining passive, the participants actively accessed digital tools to interpret unfamiliar expressions, verify grammatical structures, and search for contextual meanings. This behavior reflects how digital literacy supported learners' agency and autonomy in EFL learning processes. In several classroom sessions, participants were also observed using artificial intelligence applications to generate sentence examples, summarize learning materials, and prepare presentation scripts. These practices suggest that AI tools were integrated into participants' learning routines as cognitive support systems rather than simple technological devices.

The interview findings strengthened the observation data by showing that translation applications became essential tools for academic survival and communication adjustment. One participant explained that translation applications helped them understand both English and Indonesian classroom communication before responding to classroom interactions. Another participant admitted depending on grammar-checking applications to minimize language errors and increase confidence during assignments and presentations. These findings indicate that digital literacy practices

contributed not only to language comprehension but also to learners' emotional security and self-confidence in academic participation.

In addition, the participants perceived artificial intelligence tools as learning companions that facilitated idea development and academic expression. One participant stated that AI-assisted platforms helped generate ideas for essays and presentations when they struggled to express thoughts in English. Another participant mentioned that AI tools reduced academic stress because they provided vocabulary examples and sentence organization support. Analytically, these findings demonstrate that digital literacy practices extended beyond technical competence and became part of the participants' identity negotiation processes. Through digital engagement, the participants positioned themselves as adaptive, resourceful, and active international EFL learners capable of navigating cross-cultural and multilingual academic environments.

Multilingual identity negotiation in efl classrooms

The findings revealed that the participants continuously negotiated their multilingual identities through interactions in EFL classrooms. As Thai students studying in Indonesia while learning English, the participants regularly navigated among three languages: Thai, Indonesian, and English. Each language served different communicative and identity-related purposes depending on classroom situations and social contexts. English was mainly positioned as an academic language associated with professionalism, classroom participation, and international communication. During classroom presentations and formal discussions, the participants attempted to use English to demonstrate competence as English Education students. However, the participants admitted that they sometimes felt insecure about their pronunciation, vocabulary choices, and grammatical accuracy. One participant explained that speaking English in front of Indonesian classmates created anxiety because they worried about making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by others.

Meanwhile, Indonesian was primarily used for social adaptation and daily communication with local students. Classroom observations showed that the participants occasionally switched from English to Indonesian during informal interactions or when seeking clarification from classmates. One participant explained that using Indonesian helped them feel more accepted within the classroom community because local students became more responsive and supportive during conversations. At the same time, Thai remained an important marker of cultural identity and emotional comfort. The participants frequently communicated in Thai with fellow Thai students during breaks and informal classroom situations. One participant stated that speaking Thai helped maintain emotional connections with their home culture while living in Indonesia. These multilingual practices illustrate that identity construction occurred dynamically through language selection, social interaction, and cultural negotiation.

The findings further revealed that the participants sometimes experienced identity tension due to linguistic and cultural differences. One participant expressed feeling "between cultures" because they needed to adapt to Indonesian classroom norms while still maintaining Thai cultural values and communication styles. Another participant explained that they occasionally felt less confident compared to local students because Indonesian classmates could communicate more fluently in classroom discussions. These experiences indicate that multilingual identity negotiation involved both opportunities and emotional challenges within EFL learning environments.

Digital participation and the development of classroom confidence

Another significant finding of this study concerns the relationship between digital literacy practices and the participants' classroom confidence. The findings showed that digital technologies helped reduce anxiety and encouraged more active participation in EFL learning activities. Compared to direct oral interaction, the participants appeared more comfortable participating in digitally mediated classroom activities. During observations, the participants actively engaged in online discussions, digital presentation preparation, and text-based classroom interactions through online learning platforms. In contrast, they tended to remain quieter during spontaneous oral discussions without technological assistance. This pattern suggests that digital environments created safer spaces for participation because students had additional time to process information and prepare responses.

The interview data confirmed that digital tools helped the participants feel more confident in using English. One participant explained that grammar-checking applications reduced fear of making mistakes because they could review sentences before speaking or submitting assignments. Another participant stated that artificial intelligence tools allowed them to organize ideas more clearly before classroom presentations. These technologies provided psychological support by minimizing linguistic uncertainty and increasing preparedness. The findings also revealed that classroom confidence developed gradually through repeated digital engagement. At the beginning of the semester, the participants described themselves as passive learners who rarely expressed opinions during classroom discussions. However, after regularly using digital platforms and online learning tools, they became more willing to participate in group discussions and presentation activities. One participant explained that digital assistance made them realize that they were capable of communicating effectively in English despite linguistic limitations.

Furthermore, digital participation contributed to the construction of more positive learner identities. The participants began positioning themselves not only as international students with language difficulties but also as competent learners capable of adapting to academic demands. Through digital literacy practices, they developed greater self-confidence and stronger academic engagement in EFL classrooms.

Intercultural adaptation through digital communication practices

The findings additionally revealed that digital communication practices supported the participants' intercultural adaptation within Indonesian academic and social environments. Social media platforms, online communication applications, and digital communities became important spaces for maintaining transnational relationships while simultaneously building local social connections. The participants explained that social media allowed them to remain connected with family members and Thai friends while studying abroad. This digital connection helped reduce homesickness and emotional stress during the adaptation process in Indonesia. One participant stated that regularly communicating with family through online platforms provided emotional stability and motivation for continuing their studies. At the same time, digital communication also facilitated interaction with Indonesian classmates and lecturers. The participants joined online class groups, social media communities, and messaging applications used by local students. Through these platforms, they learned informal Indonesian expressions, classroom communication styles, and local cultural norms. One participant explained

that observing classmates' online interactions helped them better understand Indonesian humor, communication etiquette, and social expectations.

The findings further demonstrated that digital communication functioned as a bridge between cultures. The participants used social media not only for communication but also for cultural observation and self-adjustment. For example, they frequently watched Indonesian content creators, educational videos, and student activities shared online to learn about local lifestyles and academic culture. These practices helped them become more familiar with Indonesian society and reduced feelings of cultural distance. However, the findings also revealed several challenges in intercultural digital interaction. One participant mentioned experiencing confusion when classmates used local slang or mixed Indonesian and Javanese expressions in online communication. Another participant admitted that they sometimes hesitated to participate in online conversations because they were afraid of misunderstanding cultural references. Despite these difficulties, the participants gradually developed strategies for adapting to intercultural communication through continuous digital engagement. Overall, the findings suggest that digital literacy practices significantly influenced the participants' identity construction processes in EFL classrooms. Digital technologies functioned not only as learning tools but also as social and cultural mediators that shaped how the participants understood themselves as international students, multilingual speakers, and English language learners within Indonesian higher education contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital literacy practices functioned not merely as technical learning supports but as socially and psychologically meaningful resources that shaped the participants' identity negotiation in EFL classrooms. The participants used translation applications, online dictionaries, social media, and artificial intelligence platforms to maintain classroom participation and adapt to multilingual academic environments. However, the findings suggest that digital literacy should not be viewed only as an indicator of technological competence. Instead, digital literacy became a form of strategic adaptation through which international students negotiated linguistic limitations, academic expectations, and intercultural interactions simultaneously. This expands previous studies that primarily position digital literacy as a tool for improving language skills (Arora et al., 2024; Ekmekçi, 2016; Hwang et al., 2024; John et al., 2021; Mosully, 2024; Türegün Çoban & Özbek, 2025). In this study, digital literacy also functioned as a social survival mechanism that allowed participants to preserve participation and confidence within unfamiliar educational settings.

The study further revealed that identity construction among the participants was highly fluid and context-dependent. The participants continuously shifted between Thai, Indonesian, and English depending on communicative situations and social purposes. English was associated with academic legitimacy and classroom participation, Indonesian was used for sociocultural adaptation and peer interaction, while Thai remained central to emotional attachment and cultural continuity. This finding suggests that multilingual identity negotiation among international students is not simply a process of language acquisition but also a process of balancing belonging, adaptation, and self-preservation. While previous studies often describe multilingual identity as flexible and dynamic, this study indicates that such flexibility may also involve emotional tensions (Henriksen et al., 2018; Palou Sangrà & Casals, 2015; Ubaidillah et al., 2025;

Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020). The participants appeared to strategically adjust their linguistic identities to avoid exclusion and maintain acceptance in classroom interactions. Therefore, identity negotiation in EFL contexts may involve hidden emotional labor that is not always visible in classroom participation itself.

Another important finding is that digital tools appeared to reduce language anxiety and increase classroom confidence. The participants reported feeling more comfortable participating in discussions and completing assignments because digital platforms helped them organize ideas, check grammar, and generate language examples. Previous studies have similarly argued that technology-assisted learning environments can reduce learners' anxiety and encourage participation (Apridayani et al., 2023; Heeren et al., 2022; Kasap, 2022). However, the present study suggests a more complex interpretation. The participants' dependence on digital tools may simultaneously reflect empowerment and vulnerability. On one hand, digital technologies enabled learners to participate more actively and independently. On the other hand, the continuous reliance on translation and AI-assisted tools may indicate insecurity regarding linguistic competence and fear of negative evaluation in classroom communication. This implies that digital literacy practices can both support and mask learners' struggles in adapting to academic language expectations.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that digital communication spaces became important environments for intercultural adaptation and emotional support. Through social media and online communication platforms, the participants learned Indonesian classroom norms and communication styles while maintaining strong connections with Thai communities. This finding highlights that digital spaces are not neutral technological environments but socially meaningful spaces where identities are continuously negotiated and reconstructed. Unlike traditional classroom interaction, digital communication enabled the participants to move between local adaptation and transnational cultural attachment more flexibly. In this sense, digital literacy practices allowed the participants to develop hybrid identities that integrated elements of academic participation, intercultural adaptation, and cultural preservation simultaneously.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding that digital literacy practices influence not only language learning processes but also the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of identity negotiation among international students in multilingual EFL contexts. The findings suggest that digital technologies should be understood not simply as educational tools but as mediational spaces where learners negotiate belonging, confidence, and cultural identity within increasingly globalized higher education environments.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Findings: This study reveals that digital literacy practices play a significant role in supporting Thai international students' academic engagement, multilingual communication, intercultural adaptation, and identity negotiation within EFL classrooms at Universitas K.H. Abdul Chalim. Digital technologies function not only as learning tools but also as mediational resources that help students navigate linguistic, cultural, and academic challenges in a multilingual educational environment. The findings further indicate that identity negotiation among international students is closely interconnected with their engagement in digital literacy practices, particularly in shaping how they

position themselves in relation to linguistic competence, cultural belonging, and minority identity within the academic context. These results highlight the importance of recognizing digital literacy as a multidimensional practice that extends beyond technical skills into social and identity-related dimensions of language learning. **Implication:** In terms of implications, the study suggests that EFL instruction in higher education, especially in multilingual and internationalized settings, should meaningfully integrate digital literacy practices to support both academic development and identity formation. Educators and institutions are encouraged to view digital technologies as pedagogical resources that foster not only language proficiency but also intercultural understanding, student participation, and inclusive learning environments that respond to diverse learner needs. **Limitation:** However, this study is limited by its small sample size, involving only three Thai students from a single higher education institution, which restricts the transferability of the findings to broader international student populations and different educational contexts. In addition, the reliance on self-reported experiences within one EFL classroom setting may not fully capture the complexity and variability of digital literacy practices and identity negotiation across time and context. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness of digital literacy and identity development among international students. **Future research:** Therefore recommended to include participants from diverse linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds across multiple institutions to enhance the robustness of the findings. Moreover, longitudinal and mixed-method approaches are encouraged to further examine how digital literacy practices and identity negotiation evolve over time, as well as how these processes relate to academic achievement and broader intercultural learning experiences in increasingly digitalized educational environments.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Lestari Budianto led the study by developing the research concept and design, conducting data collection and analysis, interpreting the findings, and preparing the original manuscript. **Slamet Setiawan** contributed to the methodological design, provided academic supervision throughout the research process, and critically reviewed and refined the manuscript. **Pratiwi Retnaningdyah** supported the study through academic supervision, validation of the research process and findings, and substantive review of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the development of the study, reviewed the final manuscript, and approved its publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that may have influenced the content or outcome of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This manuscript complies with research and publication ethics. The authors affirm that the work is original, conducted with academic integrity, and free from any unethical practices, including plagiarism.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

The authors acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (OpenAI) as a language-support tool during the preparation of this manuscript. The tool was utilized solely to assist with

language refinement, grammar checking, and improving the clarity and readability of the text. ChatGPT was not involved in the research design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or the generation of research results. All AI-assisted outputs were carefully reviewed, verified, and revised by the authors to ensure accuracy, academic integrity, and compliance with ethical standards. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this manuscript and all conclusions presented herein.

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