



Multimodal Literacy and Multimodal Assignments in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

An Analytical Review of Potential Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the previous related and relevant studies on multimodal literacy and multimodal assignments in the Indonesian EFL context. Multimodal pedagogy is a topic that is frequently discussed by many scholars, considering its importance in helping learners of English, including within the Indonesian context, navigating better comprehension and class participation. Therefore, this analytical review paper is conducted by looking at the selected most recent fourteen studies published over the past few years, with a specific focus on multimodality and settings in EFL classrooms in Indonesia, as well as highlighting diverse participants involved in research. The result shows that most teachers and learners of English in Indonesia recognize multimodal literacy practices when they occur in the classrooms, such as in the form of videos and PowerPoint slides. Moreover, it can be found that multimodality offers opportunities for better English teaching for teachers and better English learning for students because it improves students' motivation. Furthermore, some challenges incorporating multimodal practices in classes are also discussed—for example, limitations to digital and technological resources and students' vocabularies. In conclusion, multimodal literacy practices are highly recommended in Indonesian EFL classrooms because multimodality is effective.

Keywords: *EFL, multimodal assignment, multimodal literacy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Multimodality can be defined as applying more than one mode at one time of meaning-making activity. “Multimodal” is derived from the discussion of multiliteracies where multimodal can be seen as one among other modes of meaning such as visual, audio, gestural, and spatial. The New London Group (1996) also underscores the presence of multimodality in all aspects of meaning-making, highlighting it as particularly prominent due to its ability to intersect with all modes of meaning. The notion that multimodal can be found in any meaning-making seems to align with what Kress (2000) stated in one book chapter in *Multiliteracies* that “all texts are multimodal” in which implying that for Kress, multimodal has always been there in every text since the very beginning. This new way of examining meaning and text will also affect how literacy can be seen. In other words, literacy and language are not considered a single mode anymore as it has always been in the past, emphasizing writing because other methods have been considered within meaning-making (Kress, 2003).

Throughout the years, scholars working on multimodal literacy have covered the topic with many different approaches. Within the classroom setting, Miller (2007) argued that teachers who used to live in a “print-only world” need to update their policy to the possibility of digital video composing because students nowadays are considered “digital natives.” So, teachers must learn how to do it and use it in class. However, Mills (2010) found that not every student is identified as digital natives. The findings open a whole new conversation about how teachers will incorporate multimodal literacy to benefit their diverse students by considering any considerations. I argue that this way of seeing multimodal literacy is inevitable due to technological development. However, such practice can also be considered limiting, as if multimodal only equals technical advance-related interference. In other words, the way teachers perceive multimodal literacy is by having such a concept and definition that anything presented by

technology is considered multimodal. However, it needs to be remembered the term multimodal is emphasized on the multi, which can be defined with anything, including but not limited to technology.

Aligning with Mills (2010), Yi (2014) also found a similar phenomenon of two very different types of students regarding technology and digital expertise after drawing from previous research. So, even if multimodal literacy practices in the classroom are often argued and considered beneficial, they also bring their challenges. Other challenges include resistance from the existing curriculum, making the result of the study students come out with by incorporating multimodal is not the same as the expected “learning outcomes” from the teachers. There is also a challenge arising from the point of view of how teacher needs to “reimagine assessment” because the different approach to classroom activity requires another way of evaluation. Finally, there is also an issue related to “hierarchy” from how learners and educators create a binary between print-based and multimodal practices (Yi, 2014). From my perspective, this discussion invites the debate over which comes first between curriculum and multimodal practices, a chicken and egg situation. The question would be highly pointed whether the curriculum should adjust the multimodal approach or be revised to answer the multimodal.

Another approach to multimodal literacy in the classroom is conducted from the focus of multilingual classrooms by addressing both the teachers and the students. Previous studies have been done to determine teachers’ observations during the implementation of multimodal literacy during the teaching process. It can be observed that students’ excitement is noticeable when multimodal is involved. Teachers also admitted that multimodality helps students to communicate themselves more than the non-multimodal approach can allow them; it is also essential to reconsider “text-based linguistics” as superior to “non-linguistic modes,” and teachers are encouraged to invite the students to use their first language while presenting their multimodal assignments in the class (Yi & Choi, 2015; Yi & Angay-Crowder, 2016). In other words, the previous debate has moved away from tangible elements to something physical. It can be touched like printed documents compared to any multimodal forms to the more narrowed-down discussion of linguistic versus non-linguistic debates.

Multimodality has also been structured to be paired with other terms and create a new type of term for an activity known as multimodal composing. A study conducted by Hafner and Ho (2020) seems to answer the previous challenges in terms of grading multimodal forms by having teachers specifically look at “(1) creativity and originality, 2) organization, 4) delivery, 5) modal interaction, 6) variety, and 7) genre” (p.10). Multimodal assignments require multimodal grading. It can be assumed that some of the seven criteria mentioned might not be found in traditional types of grading with conventional kinds of non-multimodal forms of assignments. Take creativity and originality, for example. Even though originality might sound like a traditional assignment is encouraged to be looked at as the result, creativity is something that multimodal forms can be highly expected to be engaged with by allowing students to express their ideas creatively. Also, another study has been done by Lim and Polio (2020) emphasizing what multimodal will most likely look like. The study found three topics considered pedagogically: “(1) Goals and instruction of multimodal writing: disciplinary versus creative expression; (2) Linguistic mode in multimodal texts: written and spoken words; and (3) Tasks of multiple writing: individual versus collaborative work.” (p.3). Creativity can once again be found, proving that multimodal value creativity tremendously. It is also interesting to see that multimodal allows the possibility of collaboration as opposed to individual modes of writing; this shows the fluid and dynamic multimodal genre in terms of how it enables multiple unexplored ideas.

Referring to the early years when the concept of multimodality was first introduced, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay by The New London Group (1996) and Kress (2000, 2003), it can be seen the topic has advanced a lot ever since then. Moreover, it is interesting to look at how multimodal is defined and proposed that no text exists with a single mode because every text tends to be multimodal. However, the most recent developments and studies have shown that multimodal literacy can eventually be narrowed down to multimodal composing. It is even more interesting to see how multimodal literacy has been challenged with multimodal composing as if the two terms are interchangeable in a particular way. Other things to be acknowledged are how the practice of multimodal literacy and multimodal composing (Hafner & Ho, 2020; Wulan et al., 2022) has predominantly moved and been directed by technological advancements and how this common practice of multimodal somehow sort of naturally defining itself. Therefore, it is essential to look at how far such multimodal techniques have been incorporated in Indonesian EFL classrooms to fill the research gap by providing a comprehensive review of implementation from such practices.

Based on these studies, the author aims to look at the studies within the topic of multimodal literacy and multimodal assignments in Indonesian EFL context through analytical review study of related studies by Indonesian scholars to find out the research questions such as (1) How multimodal literacy and multimodal assignments are incorporated into EFL classrooms, (2) What are the opportunities of incorporating multimodal literacy and multimodal assignment in Indonesia EFL classrooms and (3) What are the challenges of incorporating multimodal literacy and multimodal assignment in Indonesia EFL classrooms.

2. METHOD

The main emphasis of this current study is to review past studies analytically using qualitative methods. To do that, several selected studies should meet criteria such as (1) the studies exploring multimodal literacy and multimodal assignment, (2) the studies should also draw data from teachers and students in the settings of Indonesian EFL classrooms (3) the studies are recently published from Indonesian scholars in the past few years in peer-review journals. Therefore, the selection of the selected studies should meet the criteria that have been mentioned above to be later considered as the data for this analytical review.

The fourteen recent and relevant studies are then selected and reviewed. The three research questions guide this current study: (1) How are multimodal literacy and multimodal assignments incorporated into EFL classrooms? (2) What are the opportunities for incorporating multimodal literacy and multimodal assignment in Indonesian EFL classrooms, and (3) What are the challenges of incorporating multimodal literacy and multimodal assignment in Indonesian EFL classrooms?

The collected data then goes through the analysis stage using content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to answer the research questions by comparing what this study is looking for with what can be found within the selected literature. The data from selected studies went through grouping for classification purposes based on the three focuses of this study: three research questions.

It is also important to mention that in terms of concerns related to ethical issues, considering this current study as a theoretical study in the form of an analytical review that investigating recently published works about multimodal literacy and multimodal assignment, this recent study does not require IRB (Institutional Review Board) requirements. This is because this study does not engage with any human subjects' participants. After all, the criteria of this research only focus on previous studies within existing literature with standards as mentioned above at the beginning of this section to filter the selected studies among many other studies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Incorporating Multimodal Literacy and Multimodal Assignments into Indonesian EFL Classrooms

A qualitative analytical study by Suherdi (2015) mainly looks at multimodal pedagogy in a high school setting in Indonesia to investigate what types of multimodal text are used and how they are used in the classroom—the collection of data deriving from recordings that went through transcription and identification process before finally being analyzed. The study found that using one genre-based specific in a classroom, watching a news clip consisting of video, oral text, written text, and a webpage helps students' learning because this multimodality enables context and exposure about keywords and points. It is also found that observable multimodal pedagogy shows that the patterns include oral to written, implicit to explicit, low to high order thinking, local to global, and religious to science.

Pramono and Suherdi (2019) conducted a study on 40 students of professional teacher education who can also be considered pre-service teachers to find out the multimodal literacy of these participants. The data collected for the study comes from questionnaires distributed to every participant and then followed by semi-structured interviews for selected five participants as the sample. The study found that most participants enjoy integrating multimodal elements such as PowerPoint, images, and music. Moreover, the participants are proven to possess appropriate skills in including many modes of communication into their teaching by considering video and application. Therefore, the participants in this study who are pre-service teachers can be categorized as having relatively high levels of multimodal literacy.

Another similar study by Tan et al. (2019) has pre-service teachers from Indonesia, China, and Australia, 220 in total, to find out teachers' technological pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) in each country, specifically within the participants in this study. The TPACK survey results show that pre-service teachers are already aware and equipped about multimodality matters; however, for pre-service in both Indonesia and China, it is not quite the same. Moreover, it can also be seen that even though Indonesia's and China's pre-service teachers do not receive formal training related to multimodality from their respective programs, they can gain awareness and knowledge through implicit knowledge.

A qualitative study by Seftika et al. (2021) with one lecturer from a private university as a single subject participant is done by collecting the data through lesson plans and lesson materials, classroom observation, and semi-structured interviews. The study specifically looks at how the teacher implements visual design as part of

multimodality in the classroom. The result of the study shows that the forms of graphic design being integrated throughout the multiple classroom meetings are through PowerPoint, Google Classroom, and videos. It is also found that the use of those visual-based mediums helps the teacher communicate the materials at the same time, helps students comprehend the concepts.

Trisanti et al. (2022) did a mixed-method study using questionnaires and interviews of 38 in-service EFL teachers in three different regions, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Java in Indonesia, as participants. The result shows that most of the participants indicated a preference for visual, auditory, and written to help deliver the materials. Moreover, the study also found that participants were willing to switch between multimodal and traditional approaches.

Based on the selected previous research that has been conducted and mentioned in this section, students and teachers are interested in a multimodal learning environment. This means it shows positive patterns for possible future implementation of multimodality in EFL classrooms context based on their attitudes toward the concept.

3.2. Opportunities of Incorporating Multimodal Literacy and Multimodal Assignments in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

A study conducted by Suparmi (2017) with 60 students as participants in an English for Specific Purposes course to determine the effectiveness of including multimodality in language learning framed particularly in writing skills by comparing pre-test and post-test of two groups. Moreover, after the analysis stage through the t-test, it can be concluded that those exposed to multimodality in terms of video with subtitles before writing their post-test possess higher scores than those exposed to a model text as a traditional non-multimodal approach. Therefore, the study concludes that a language environment with multimodality embedded elements proves to be an essential factor and effective for writing performance.

Nabhan and Hidayat (2018) did a study with both teachers and students as the participants. The study focuses on one reading class and one writing class to examine the multiliteracies and multimodal literacies practices among students using questionnaires, focus groups, observation, and documents specifically for students participating and then interviews for the teachers. The result of this study has found that due to the nature of the students generally categorized as digital natives, they already have quite a good mastery of digital literacy, which directly impacts how well they navigate around multiliteracies and multimodal texts both in reading and writing activities.

Descriptive qualitative research conducted by Djamdjuri et al. (2021) describes what students perceive about online mode EFL learning classrooms with embedded Islamic-related learning materials using 47 students as participants from a private Islamic university for the study. The data collected for this study is through questionnaires and interviews. The study found that most participants showed a positive attitude towards the Islamic materials within the teaching materials. Moreover, more than half confirm they are fond of online learning with specific preference referring to YouTube and Zoom meeting applications, among many other options.

Wulan et al. (2022) did a study with the narrative inquiry method, specifically on digital multimodal composing (DMC), with 25 vocational high school students. Participants went through interviews and were required to write a reflection for the data collection stage. The study revealed that DMC enables students to be more exposed to many alternatives of technology and engage with multiliteracies skills during the process. Furthermore, other benefits that are found include the increase of awareness in terms of social issues while doing peer collaboration.

Another similar study using narrative inquiry as the analysis method can be found in Sholikhah (2023), who collects the data from semi-structured interviews with 2 participants in a speaking class within EFL settings. The study highlights 2 participants possessing other English proficiency, experiencing multimodal text in a picture and video format. The study found that even though the perception towards the given multimodal text might not be the same, it is somewhat easy for one of them yet challenging for the other to improve participants' enthusiasm and motivation in learning the materials. Therefore, the study found that integrating multimodal text benefits thinking and reading skills.

Referring to these selected previous studies, the opportunity to apply multimodality is preferably high because the student populations are considered digital natives, and the nature of multimodality promotes fun class activity.

3.3. Challenges of Incorporating Multimodal Literacy and Multimodal Assignments in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

Ilmi et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study on 44 private high school students who were grouped into 7 different groups and then asked to complete an assignment of creating an advertisement video. This study is framed

under multiliteracies pedagogy and multimodality approach. The study found that all groups demonstrated multimode on their video as the final product, with visual and auditory as the most frequently used modes. However, the differing quality of the digital multimodal text created by each group might have something to do with how members in the group coordinate with each other.

While a similar research topic about digital multimodal composing is also conducted by Sari (2022), the study takes a different approach by not assigning the students to make a video but a narrative text on Wattpad instead. The study uses qualitative analysis by collecting data from observation and semi-structured interviews with 26 vocational high school students. The survey results show that Wattpad helps improve students' motivation in writing, especially narrative text; however, there are some noticeable challenges, including the grammar aspect, which students may encounter because Wattpad does not enable students to have grammar-checking. Thus, some students have a difficult time.

Aryana et al. (2022) conducted a descriptive quantitative study by looking at 524 students from a university in Bali. The purpose of the study was to find out students' perceptions regarding the incorporation of a multimodal approach in EFL classrooms through E-learning. The study found that students are fond of using pictures and videos; more specifically, photos with less text help students comprehend the material better. However, the study also found that music is less effective than pictures and videos because it does not improve motivation or enthusiasm as much as pictures and videos. With that said, music can still be incorporated into the classroom but functions only to set the mood.

Sidik (2022) conducted a qualitative multiple-case study by collecting data from multiple schools in Serang and Pandeglang through classroom observation, interview, and curriculum documents data collection with 103 participants in total, both students and teachers. The study found that even though multimodality exists in these selected schools for the study, the use of multimodal literacy is only partially intended to educate students about multimodal literacy but rather functioned as supplementary to teaching English classes. The study also advocates for the government to create a professional development specifically to address the issue of multimodal literacy for teachers so that the teachers can be equipped with the knowledge related to multimodal literacy.

Therefore, the selected existing literature indicates that some challenges might be related to how multimodality is implemented and that more intentional practices should be adjusted. With that said, how multimodality is incorporated should always consider the students' populations and characteristics in mind.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on this analytical review surrounding the topic of multimodal literacy and multimodal assignments in Indonesian EFL classrooms, multimodal literacy practices can be found in multiple educational settings, from junior high school to high school to university level. This theoretical study found that (1) teachers have been teaching EFL through various modes of meaning-making aligning with The New London Group (1996), including visual using PowerPoint slides and images, auditory using music, or both through videos or YouTube videos. Furthermore, multimodality also comes from incorporating digital literacy, such as the Wattpad website, Google Classroom, and Zoom meetings. This study also found (2) multiple potential opportunities by applying multimodal literacy in Indonesian EFL classrooms because students nowadays are considered digital natives, causing the smooth transition from traditional modes to multimodal modes and in-person meetings to online/virtual conferences. Versatile teachers who accommodate multimodal and non-multimodal practices also support Miller's (2007) argument that there needs to be flexibility considering students' diversity in navigating multimodal approaches. Moreover, other opportunities are the noticeable increase in students' motivation for multimodal learning and the exposure to developing collaborative skills. However, this study also addresses (3) challenges when implementing multimodal literacy, considering students' diverse English competence. It is essential to mention that not all collaborative work can be successfully done in every classroom because, for some students, collaboration can be a challenging task. Then, even though students' motivation can significantly increase during multimodal related activities, other components like grammar possessed by each student are different so they can be contributing factors throughout the whole process. Finally, it is also crucial to acknowledge the challenges experienced by not only the students but also the teachers as Sidik (2022) have found that three needs to be professional development specifically created and aimed for the teachers to be well equipped regarding the knowledge and skills about multimodal literacy practices to ensure better implementation of multimodal learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

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