The Integration of Multimodality in English as a Foreign Language Learning in Indonesia

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed human communication, shifting from text-based and verbal interactions to multimodal exchanges that incorporate visual, audio, gestural, and other semiotic elements. This shift has significant implications for education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, where students increasingly engage with multimodal content in their daily lives. This study looks into how multimodality is included into EFL classrooms in Indonesia through a literature review, analyzing its conceptual foundations, supporting policies, and current practices. The synthesis reveals that while multimodality enhances student engagement, comprehension, creativity, and critical thinking which are essential for digital-native learners, challenges such as limited teacher training, inadequate access to technology, and regional disparities hinder its implementation. The review concludes with recommendations for future research, including exploring teachers' perspectives, developing effective multimodal strategies, and investigating the impact of multimodality on student learning outcomes in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learning; Multimodality; Multimodal Literacy

Introduction

The proliferation of digital technology has brought significant changes to human communication patterns. Today, interactions no longer rely solely on text-based or verbal communication but also involve various other modes, such as visual, audio, gestural, and other semiotic elements – referred to as multimodality (Jewitt, 2009a; Kress, 2009b; Lim et al., 2022). This phenomenon is evident in the increasing engagement with various internet-based digital platforms, including social media, websites, and video content, which enable more dynamic and multimodal meaning-making. Although multimodal communication is not entirely new, technological advancements have made it more accessible and applicable in various aspects of life. In education, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, these changes have inevitably shaped instructional practices. As students increasingly engage with multimodal content in their daily lives, educational settings are expected to reflect and accommodate these evolving communication patterns. This shift highlights the need for teachers to adapt their teaching methods to align with the multimodal communication environment.

According to Bouchey et al. (2021), there are three key reasons why EFL teachers should integrate multimodality into their instruction. First, the proliferation of information across multiple modes provides diverse access points for learning, allowing students to engage with content in ways that cater to their individual needs. Second, the increasing opportunities for individuals to communicate through various modes foster creativity and critical thinking beyond traditional text-based formats. Finally, the growing diversity of students necessitates more flexible and inclusive instructional approaches to accommodate different learning preferences.

In addition to these reasons, previous research highlights several benefits of integrating multimodality into teaching practices. It enhances students' comprehension and retention of knowledge (Ganapathy & Seetharam, 2016) and encourages the development of higher-order critical thinking skills, particularly for students who struggle with traditional text-based instruction (Anderson et al., 2017). Moreover, students report that the integration of multimodality makes learning more interactive and enjoyable, contributing to a richer and more engaging learning experience (Djamdjuri et al., 2021). Additionally, multimodal pedagogy has been shown to enhance digital literacy, a competency that is becoming essential in both contemporary educational settings and professional fields (Kustini et al., 2018). Similarly, Chen (2021) discovered that students responded positively to teachers' multimodal pedagogies, valuing the diverse meaning-making opportunities provided through multimodal composing.

To address the significance of incorporating multimodality into EFL classrooms, educational researchers and teachers in Indonesia have explored its implementation, identifying both its challenges and potential benefits. Policymakers have also played a role in promoting the integration of multimodal approaches into EFL instruction, reflecting a growing awareness of its pedagogical value. Given this increasing interest, it is essential to assess the current state of research on multimodality in Indonesian EFL contexts over the past decade.

Previous studies have reviewed empirical research on multimodality and its integration into language learning (Kulju et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2022). However, few studies have specifically focused on EFL teaching in the Indonesian context. This review will examine current research trends, analyze the pedagogical applications of multimodality, and identify key challenges and opportunities for future research within the Indonesian EFL context. It also proposes directions for future research to further enhance the incorporation of multimodality in EFL education.

Research Methods

This study adopts a literature review method, which serves as a suitable approach for establishing a thorough understanding of a topic, especially regarding its theoretical and conceptual foundations (Rahmani et al., 2023). The study aims to consolidate existing knowledge on multimodality and its pedagogical applications in EFL learning in Indonesia by examining a diverse range of scholarly sources, such as books, journal articles, and papers pertaining to educational policy. A structured approach is adopted to investigate how multimodal meaning-making influences pedagogical practices in EFL classrooms. First, the study explores the conceptual foundations of multimodality, tracing its theoretical origins to establish a comprehensive understanding of its role in language education. The study then discusses the benefits of multimodality in language learning. Next, it examines current policies and practices related to multimodality integration in EFL teaching within the Indonesian education system, identifying existing strategies and areas for improvement. Finally, it analyzes the challenges teachers face in implementing multimodality in Indonesian EFL classrooms, highlighting key barriers and potential opportunities for future development.

Results and Discussion

The findings from the literature review reveal several key insights regarding the integration of multimodality in Indonesian EFL classrooms. These insights are organized into three main areas: the conceptual foundations of multimodality, policies supporting multimodality, and current practices of

multimodality in Indonesia, including the challenges prospects of incorporating multimodality into EFL teaching practice. The discussion synthesizes these findings, highlighting both the potential of multimodality to transform EFL learning and the systemic barriers that must be addressed to realize this potential.

1. Conceptual Understanding of Multimodality in EFL Education

Communication has traditionally been dominated by language as the primary mode of meaning-making. However, the concept of multimodality challenges this notion by emphasizing that communication is inherently multifaceted, involving the integration of including gestural, verbal, visual, auditory, and spatial components (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Jewitt et al., 2016; Kress, 2009a). These modes work together to create meaning, reflecting the complexity of human interaction and the diverse ways in which individuals express and interpret ideas. Multimodality, therefore, is not merely an additive process but a dynamic interplay of modes that enriches communication and meaning-making.

The term "multimodality" was formally introduced in the late 1990s by Kress and van Leeuwen in their groundbreaking work, Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication. However, the practice of using multiple modes for communication predates this conceptualization. Historical examples, such as the visual hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt or the detailed sketches and annotations of Leonardo da Vinci, illustrate that humans have long relied on multimodal practices to convey complex ideas (Serafini, 2014). These examples underscore that multimodality is not a modern invention but a fundamental aspect of human communication that has evolved alongside technological and cultural advancements.

In the context of education, the "multimodal turn" (Jewitt, 2009b, p. 4) marks a significant shift from language-centric pedagogies to approaches that embrace the integration of diverse semiotic resources. This shift was largely influenced by The New London Group (1996) multiliteracies framework, which argued for the need to adapt education to the increasing diversity of communication modes and the global interconnectedness of the digital age. Multimodality in education recognizes that literacy is no longer confined to traditional reading and writing but extends to the ability to navigate, interpret, and create texts across multiple modes and media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2021; Lim et al., 2022). This expanded view of literacy, often referred to as multimodal literacy, equips learners with the skills to engage critically with diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, preparing them for the complexities of a globalized world.

The integration of multimodality into EFL education offers transformative potential. Multimodal pedagogies enable learners to engage with language in dynamic and context-rich ways, fostering deeper comprehension and critical thinking (Anderson et al., 2017; Ganapathy & Seetharam, 2016). For instance, incorporating visual aids, audio clips, and digital tools into language lessons can enhance vocabulary acquisition, improve listening and speaking skills, and promote creative expression. Moreover, multimodal approaches align with the learning preferences of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001), who are accustomed to interacting with multimodal texts through digital platforms such as social media, videos, and interactive apps. By leveraging these familiar modes, teachers can create more engaging and relevant learning experiences that resonate with students' everyday lives.

The rise of digital technologies has further amplified the importance of multimodality in education. The Digital Period has ushered in an era where text, images, videos, and sound are seamlessly integrated, enabling new forms of communication and expression (Jewitt, 2009a). In EFL classrooms, digital tools such as multimedia presentations, online collaborative platforms, and interactive apps provide opportunities for students to practice language skills in authentic, multimodal contexts. These technologies not only enhance language learning but also prepare students to navigate the multimodal communication environments they will encounter in higher education, the workplace, and beyond.

However, the successful implementation of multimodal pedagogies in EFL education requires a shift in teaching practices and mindsets. Teachers must move beyond traditional, text-based approaches and embrace the use of diverse semiotic resources in their instruction. This includes designing lessons that

incorporate multimodality as well as providing opportunities for students to create and share multimodal texts. Professional development and training are essential to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively integrate multimodality into their classrooms.

In conclusion, multimodality represents a paradigm shift in EFL education, offering a more holistic and inclusive approach to language teaching and learning. By recognizing the interconnectedness of linguistic and non-linguistic modes, Teachers can create richer, more engaging learning experiences that prepare students to thrive in a multimodal world. As communication continues to evolve in the digital age, the integration of multimodality into EFL education is not just an option but a necessity, ensuring that students are prepared with the necessary skills and competencies to navigate and contribute to an increasingly complex and interconnected global society.

2. Indonesian Policies on Multimodality in EFL Classrooms

The Indonesian government has established several policies to integrate multimodality into education, particularly in EFL instruction. One of the key initiatives supporting this integration is the School Literacy Movement (SLM). Launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture, SLM expands literacy beyond traditional print-based methods to include visual, auditory, spatial, and digital forms, highlighting the importance of fostering critical engagement with multimodal texts to prepare learners for the complexities of the digital era (Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation, 2015). This policy aligns with global educational trends by redefining "texts" to encompass multimodal elements, thereby equipping students with essential literacy skills for 21st-century communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009).

Another significant policy framework is the Merdeka Curriculum, outlined in the Head of the Agency for Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Decree Number 033/H/KR/2022, which promotes the integration of multimodality through a genre-based approach. This curriculum encourages the use of diverse communication modes in EFL learning, emphasizing students' ability to comprehend and produce texts across various genres, including digital and multimedia formats (Head of Education Standard, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Decree, 2022). By embedding multimodal literacy within its objectives, the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to enhance students' communicative competence in a way that reflects contemporary language use. Within the curriculum, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT) has also introduced the Digitalization of Schools program, which aims to improve access to digital resources and enhance multimodal teaching and learning environments (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation, 2024). This initiative provides technological infrastructure and educational platforms, reinforcing the government's commitment to multimodal integration in classrooms.

Overall, these policies demonstrate Indonesia's commitment to embedding multimodality within EFL education. By incorporating multimodal literacy into national education frameworks, Indonesia aligns with global educational reforms that recognize the significance of diverse communication modes in contemporary learning environments. The effectiveness of these policies, however, depends on their implementation and the availability of resources to support multimodal instruction across diverse educational contexts.

3. Challenges and Prospects of Integrating Multimodality in Indonesian EFL

While the concept of multiliteracies has gained prominence for over two decades (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; The New London Group, 1996, 2000), the use of a multimodal-based approach in literacy learning, especially in English pedagogy, remains uncommon in the Indonesian educational context (Drajati et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2019). Nonetheless, most EFL teachers and students recognize multimodal literacy practices in their classrooms, such as using videos and PowerPoint slides (D. B. Sutrisno, 2024). However, there is a growing awareness among Teachers and policymakers about the potential benefits of integrating multimodal approaches into English pedagogy (D. Sutrisno et al., 2023).

The recognition of multimodality in literacy learning within the Indonesian educational context can be traced through the evolution of previous curriculums. In versions such as KTSP and K-13, the primary

focus of English pedagogy was on language-based literacy (Sidik, 2021). Later, revisions were made to incorporate other aspects of literacy, including multimodality (Ditjen Dikdasmen SLM Taskforce, 2018; Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation, 2015). These revisions demonstrate an increasing awareness among policy makers regarding the diverse literacy needs of students, encompassing not only language-based skills but also multimodal literacy for effective communication and expression.

However, within the prevalent language-based pedagogy in Indonesia, non-linguistic resources for meaning-making were not initially recognized as such (Suherdi, 2015; Sukyadi et al., 2016). Despite their potential to contribute to creating and sharing meanings in literacy pedagogy (Jewitt, 2005) independently or collaboratively with language, these resources are often perceived primarily as pedagogical aids or even as mere decorations (Iyer & Luke, 2010; Jewitt, 2005) to support language-based literacy teaching (Suherdi, 2015; Sukyadi et al., 2016).

Showcasing this issue, the government has introduced initiatives to support multimodality in national education through educational policy reforms, particularly the SLM policy, which promotes the integration of multimodality into school pedagogy, including English teaching and learning (Ditjen Dikdasmen SLM Taskforce, 2018; Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation, 2015; Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation, 2018; Presidential Regulation, 2017). Moreover, the current Merdeka curriculum highlights the importance of multimodality, particularly in English pedagogy, which has gained increased awareness. It is noted that teachers can integrate multimodality into language learning through a genre-based approach (Head of Education Standard, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Decree, 2022).

Bringing this policy into the classroom setting presents both challenges and promising prospects for education. Multimodality, which involves the use of multiple modes of communication such as text, images, videos, and audio, is gradually gaining recognition as an effective approach to teaching and learning (Bouchey et al., 2021; Kessler, 2022; Liang & Yao, 2023; Lin et al., 2022; Peng, 2019). Embracing multimodality in this digital era is not only essential but transformative for students, enabling them to utilize available meaning-making resources while engaging in disciplinary practices (Grapin, 2019). However, its implementation faces several hurdles that need to be addressed for its full potential to be realized.

One of the main challenges in implementing multimodality in Indonesian schools is the limited awareness and training among Teachers (Jayanti & Damayanti, 2023; Yusa et al., 2023). While EFL teachers have demonstrated the ability to adapt and incorporate multimodal literacy into their teaching materials, and they are also aware of the shift from traditional to digital teaching methods (Trisanti et al., 2022), many teachers are unfamiliar with multimodal teaching strategies and may lack the necessary skills to effectively integrate different modes into their lessons (Jayanti & Damayanti, 2023). Moreover, teachers' inadequate technical skills and knowledge in digital technology for accessing and utilizing online educational resources (Cahyadi et al., 2021; Waluyo et al., 2022; Winoto, 2022) that support multimodality pose another challenge. This gap in knowledge and training impedes the widespread adoption of multimodality and diminishes its impact on student learning.

Another significant challenge is disparities in availability and access to technology and resources between regions in Indonesia (Cahyadi et al., 2021; Jayanti & Damayanti, 2023; D. B. Sutrisno, 2024; Waluyo et al., 2022; Winoto, 2022; Yaqin et al., 2023) which support multimodal learning. Not all schools in Indonesia have access to sufficient digital tools, such as computers, tablets, and multimedia projectors, which are essential for creating and delivering multimodal lessons. Additionally, discrepancies in internet access and digital content further widen the digital divide among schools and students (Cahaya et al., 2022; Cahyadi et al., 2021; Waluyo et al., 2022; Winoto, 2022; Yaqin et al., 2023).

Despite these challenges, there are promising prospects for the future of multimodality in Indonesian schools. As digital technology becomes more accessible and affordable, schools have the opportunity to invest in multimedia resources and equip teachers with the necessary training and support. Furthermore, the government has continuously endeavored to enhance national education, aiming to equip individuals for a better quality of life, both at present and in the future, by responding to dynamic global

rapid changes, including the integration of multimodality (Ditjen Dikdasmen SLM Taskforce, 2018; Head of Education Standard, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Decree, 2022; Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation, 2018; Presidential Regulation, 2017). This integration is pursued to align with contemporary literacy practices in students' current and future everyday lives (The New London Group, 1996, 2000). Additionally, there is growing recognition among Teachers and policymakers of the benefits of multimodality, particularly in English pedagogy (Head of Education Standard, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Decree, 2022), such as improved engagement (Qin & Wang, 2021) and motivation (D. B. Sutrisno, 2024), enhanced comprehension (Dahlström, 2022), and increased creativity and critical thinking among students (Lim & Toh, 2020; Trisanti et al., 2022).

Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper has reviewed relevant literatures regarding to the integration of multimodality in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The concept of multimodality and its growing importance in the digital age were explored, highlighting the necessity for its inclusion in the curriculum. An analysis of Indonesian policy on English language education was presented, demonstrating a growing recognition of multimodality's potential. However, the review also identified challenges faced in implementing multimodality, including limited teacher training and disparities in access to technology and resources.

Despite these challenges, the future of multimodality in Indonesian EFL classrooms appears promising. As technology becomes more accessible and the government prioritizes educational advancement, opportunities exist for increased investment in resources and teacher training. The potential benefits of multimodality, including enhanced engagement, comprehension, creativity, and critical thinking, provide compelling reasons for its continued exploration and integration within Indonesian EFL classrooms.

This review highlights several areas for further research. First, future studies could examine teachers' perspectives on the integration of multimodality, focusing on their attitudes and self-efficacy in its implementation. Second, research could explore effective strategies for incorporating multimodality into EFL classrooms, considering the specific context of Indonesian education. Third, studies are needed to investigate the impact of multimodality on student learning outcomes in Indonesian EFL settings. Finally, future research could explore the role of students as active participants in multimodal learning environments, examining how they engage with and create multimodal texts to enhance their language learning experiences.

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