

# More than Words:

## ESP learners' perceptions on the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy

Siti Kustini\*

Informatics Engineering Department  
State Polytechnic of Banjarmasin  
Banjarmasin, Indonesia  
\*kustini@poliban.ac.id

Didi Suherdi, Bachrudin Musthafa

English Education Department  
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia  
Bandung, Indonesia  
suherdi\_d@upi.edu, dinmusthafa@upi.edu

**Abstract**—Acknowledging learners' growing engagement with emergence technologies and multimodal practices in and outside of school, teachers are required to reconceptualize their pedagogical frameworks to assist learners in the learning and knowledge constructions using digital multimodal devices. In the field of English literacy education, multiliteracies pedagogy was offered as a promising solution to align with these educational demands. From the pedagogical perspectives of multiliteracies, learners are given ample opportunities to acquire multiple sets of literacy skills and knowledge including multimodal literacy, critical literacy and digital literacy. This study explores students' perceptions on the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy in an ESP classroom. To this end, a qualitative inquiry was conducted with interview and students' reflective journals as the main sources of data collection. The research was undertaken in an Informatics Engineering Study Program of a state polytechnic in Banjarmasin involving 30 semesters one students as participants. The interview data and students' personal narratives were transcribed, coded, and thematically put into categories to achieve the set research objective. The results indicate that the students perceived the integration of multiliteracies pedagogies in their ESP learning positively because they felt the lesson was insightful, engaging, motivating, yet challenging. It can be concluded that the multiliteracies framework can be implemented in ESP contexts as an alternative approach to facilitate students' learning in this digital and multimodal era.

**Keywords**—ESP; implementation; multimodal; multiliteracies pedagogy; technology

### I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution and global proliferation of information and communication technologies (computers, mobile phones, the internet, and Web 2.0 applications, file-sharing technology, etc.) has impacted the nature of texts and the patterns learners use and interact with texts. Today's learners, labelled as "Millennials" [1], "Net-Generations/N-Geners" [2] or "Digital Natives" [3] are increasingly engaged with and dramatically exposed to the burgeoning digital multimodal texts including hypertexts, hypermedia (orchestrating images, videos, and other non-textual features), and hyperlinks along with printed-based texts. This shift, undoubtedly, has led to the emergence of new practices of literacy. As Kress argues that literacy is no longer isolated from a vast array of social, technological, and economic influences, and he points that the medium of

contemporary literacy practices has been switched from a centuries-long dominance of print texts to the increasingly popular use of screen [4]. Therefore, it is indispensable that today's teachers are required to reform and reconceptualize their instructional practices in that they provide new dimensions of learning involving rich and complex learning experiences that go beyond the traditional print-based materials for students. In addition, teachers are also suggested to equip learners with knowledge and skills in handling, managing and transforming information and knowledge represented by the technological resource [5] and teach them to relate those knowledge and skills in a variety of social contexts [6,7]. Accordingly, a number of literacy scholars are currently devoting their efforts to inspire educators to understand the nature of the changes in literacy practices and advocate them to foster and leverage of multimodal literacy among language learners [8-13]. They also strive to construct new pedagogical approach that fuse together traditional (print-focused notions of literacy) and modern (multimodal) aspects of literacy and redefine the nature of learning, and teacher and student roles in the classroom [14].

As regards English foreign language (EFL) education, there is a growing awareness of the importance of fostering multimodal literacy in the pedagogical practices [15-17]. As Hafner, points out [18], English language teaching should "be expanded beyond the traditional focus on speech and writing to the production of multimodal ensembles, drawing on a range of other semiotic modes". In addition, Shoffner, Oliveira, and Angus, postulate that today's English classroom requires an extended understanding and enactment of literacy [19]. Rather than an all-inclusive single literacy, English teachers must accept the changing nature and flexible nature of literacies that address areas as diverse as technology, multimedia, relationships and culture. Further, Siegel has suggested the inclusion of multimodality in the classroom for two reasons [20]: students live in the era that demands new literacies, and they often bring multimodal practices to school. Based on these perspectives, EFL teaching is required to extend the focus of its pedagogical practices beyond communicative competence [21,22] and step up into multimodal communicative competence [23], the one which recognizes the interrelationship between language and other semiotic resources.

In a similar vein, in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the ESP pedagogical practices are advocated to consider the development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century texts [24] and move away from text-centered approach. Learning which takes primary focus on content-specific reading along with grammar and vocabulary exercises should be reframed. In the light of multimodal era, Guo also argues that ESP teachers should “revisit traditional learning practices in which learners should be given new opportunities of interactive engagement in creating discipline-oriented content complemented by the development of their English language skills” [25].

Linguists and literacy practitioners working in the field of English language teaching has called upon literacy pedagogy that accounts for the complexities of multimodal texts constructed within collaborative platforms and digitally mediated technologies [8,26]. It was in 1994 that a group of literacy educators, named as the New London Group, introduced the notion of multiliteracies to encompass a variety of representational modes as communication channels [27] and to expand the traditional language-based approach to literacy, which failed to capture the complexity and multifaceted nature of emerging communication practices [28]. This group also set up a multiliteracies pedagogy which was organized into a new “what” for literacy pedagogy and a new “how” for literacy pedagogy [29,30,8]. The “what” of multiliteracies pedagogy draws from multiple modes of meaning making to support a design process of literacy learning. The “how” of multiliteracies pedagogy draws from a range of relationships between four components: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice.

On the subject of the “what” of multiliteracies, the New London Group (NLG) set out two central points: multimodality and learning by design concept. In the case of the first, the multiliteracies emphasizes on the complexity of meaning making where texts and resources are multimodal, and the proliferation where meaning makers are active “re-makers of signs and transformers of meaning [8]. The case of the second pinpoints the adoption of the term “design” to describe the forms of meaning as this word is regarded to be “free from negative associations for teachers of terms such as ‘grammar’” [29].

In regard to multiliteracies pedagogy, the New London Group developed a pedagogical framework of multiliteracies that integrates four components: Situated Practice; Overt Instruction; Critical Framing; and Transformed Practice. The notion of *situated practice* means the “immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles based on their background and experiences [29]. The second component is that of overt instruction. This concept includes all the activities that “scaffold learning activities, that focus the learners on the important features of their experiences and activities within the community of learners, and that allow the learner to gain explicit information” [29]. *Critical framing* refers to teachers’ assistance for learners to continually frame and examine their learning and literate practices, “in relation to the historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centered relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice [29]. The final component of multiliteracies pedagogy is

*transformed practice*. It is the goal of multiliteracies theory that learners will take these skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they have learned through the components of situated practice, overt instruction and critical framing and apply these to their lives outside of the school in real-world contexts [27,29].

This study attempts to explore ESP learners’ general attitudes and perceptions on the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy. The results hopefully could provide insights for ESP educators in particular and English language teachers in general on the potential benefits and challenges regarding the instructional practice of this pedagogy.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

### A. Research Design

The purpose of this study is to find out students’ perceptions on the implementation of multiliteracies pedagogy in an ESP classroom. To this end, a qualitative inquiry embracing case study design was employed. This approach also had the potential to provide an in-depth understanding of process rather than outcome [31] and to achieve holistic picture of the research and participants of the study. This includes the “detailed views” of participants and research conducted in the participants’ “natural setting” [32]. In addition, the qualitative case study design offers “rigorous and thorough data collection and analysis” which can be used to further develop themes and theories that lead to improved understanding of a phenomenon [33].

### B. Research Site and Participants

The study was undertaken at the Informatics Engineering Program of a State Polytechnic in Banjarmasin. This site was chosen because the researcher was one of the faculty members in the institution and had been teaching there for 13 years so that the researcher got easy access, thus increase the feasibility of this study. As common in qualitative research, the participants of are generally purposeful. The participants of this study were 30 semesters two students of Informatics Engineering Study Program taking ESP course academic year 2017/2018.

### C. Data Collection and Analysis

The data of this study were obtained from the interview and students’ written reflections. The interview data were used to help students to bring their awareness of the knowledge gained in the teaching program and to seek some information on the teaching program implemented from the students’ perspectives. In addition, the interview not only leads to unexpected insights, but also allows the researcher to receive spontaneous responses to a question. It can also enable a researcher to enquire as to why individuals behave in the way that they do. The interview was conducted at the end of the teaching program. The interview was video-recorded with the agreement of the interviewees. The researcher set up the interview appointments and facilitated a quiet environment where interruptions could not occur during the interview. The responses were transcribed and all respondents were asked the same questions. The

interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia; however, the interviewees could also use English in expressing their ideas. Bahasa Indonesia is the participants' national language.

The students' reflections contained the records of what they thought they learnt from the teacher and from friends in each meeting. The students were encouraged to reflect on the learning event and exercise their judgment about the content and the processes of learning. These journals play an important role to let the participants share their own minds and hearts in difficult situations, ones that call for them to figure out something to do or say.

The data from the interview were immediately transcribed, translated, categorized and subsequently interpreted. During the transcription stage students' names were substituted with pseudonyms [34]. All the data from the interview were analyzed in steps. The first one is to put the interview questions into categories. The thematic analyses Kvale and Merriam, were then developed [35,36]. Then the data from the interview stage were presented in a condensed body of information.

#### *D. The Multiliteracies ESP Course Program*

In terms of the course program implementation, the lesson plan was thoroughly designed. Fourteen meetings of multiliteracies ESP program were set up. In regards teaching materials, authentic multimodal texts were used. The authentic texts are not only in the form of printed-based materials but also non-printed materials such as visual texts and image textual texts. These texts were considered "as a main source of the target language input" [37], that were particularly useful in helping learners understand the language used, as well as the target culture, and "the means by which [the learner] can bridge the gap between classroom knowledge and an effective capacity to participate in real language events" [38].

The multiliteracies projects assigned for the students were e-MiniMagz and digital video presentation. The e-MiniMagz is a project of creating and designing a magazine-like of a particular topic related to current issues of specific subjects in digital form. This project is a group-based project in which each group should determine a topic and translate it into sub-topics of their particular interest. Students could include various modes in the text construction to make them more meaningful, understandable, and interesting. The multimodal project of video presentation was intended to measure students' ability in writing expository text that required them to design a digital video using verbal and visual aspects of content-specific English language. This is an individual project in which students should select a particular topic and develop the topic into a digital multimodal expository paragraph.

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As discussed earlier, the data in this study were obtained from interview and students' written reflections. The interview sessions were conducted right after the teaching programs. Two central themes were set up as guiding questions: students' general perceptions of the teaching program including their perceptions on the use of technology and multimodal texts during the instructional practices, and students' suggestions for further improvement of the teaching program.

The findings of this study suggest that the multiliteracies program was perceived by the students to be very motivating and engaging. Most students also thought the program was enjoyable for two reasons. The first reason was related to the materials presented in the classroom. The students stated that the materials were all about current issues and presented in the form of multimodal texts (i.e. the combination of images, video, music, and printed texts) and this could help them add their knowledge and insights to the latest social issues so that they were kept updated. The visual and images presented were also helpful in grasping the meaning of the linguistics aspects in the texts. The second one was related to the atmosphere of learning. They admitted that they enjoyed the program because the classroom atmosphere was warm, relaxed and friendly. In addition, the teaching program likely improved not only their English proficiency and confidence in using their English for communication but also their technological skills. The following are some excerpts from the students' interview:

*The program is very useful particularly on the technological knowledge. This program improves not only our English skills but also adds insights to the current issues related to our study program. (Int#1: S1)*

*This program is useful. I learn a lot of new thing. I get many new vocabularies; I also get the knowledge of the meaning of image in texts. My English is getting better although it is not significant, because we only learn in a very short period of time. I enjoy the lesson very much. (Int#:S8)*

*I think the teaching program conducted this semester is very useful. I like being in this class. The way the materials presented is different from the previous English class. The teacher uses many media and internet applications, I feel confident in learning English and I don't get bored. (Int#1: S12)*

*The program is enjoyable. It's not monotonous. We get various tasks and activities in the classroom. Each student gets different assignments, so they cannot cheat on each other. (Int#1: 20)*

*Within one semester I learn English with the way I've never had before, I was required to use technology as much as possible, ranging from learning management system (Schoology), web applications and others. This is a kind of fun learning because I learn not only from printer texts, but also from videos and pictures through technology. Even if I don't have a good ability in English, I become more familiar with English vocabularies and I feel motivated in leaning. I really enjoy learning very much. (S2#Reflective journal May, 28, 2018)*

The results of this study revealed that most students had favorable perceptions of the implementation of multiliteracy pedagogy in their classroom. These findings support other studies within this area. For example, the study conducted Pishol and Kaur reporting that the use of multiliteracies approach in the reading class promote positive outcomes on students learning in that the students felt the lesson was engaging, interesting, and enjoyable [39]. The study conducted

by Yi and Choi also shares similar results [40]. Finding out teachers' perspectives of multimodal practices in K-12 classes, this study revealed that multimodal teaching using multiliteracies approach could significantly increase learners' motivation and engagement. They stated that multimodal instruction was powerful in stimulating, motivating, arousing interest, and calling student's attention during the instructional process. The positive insights of implementing multiliteracies approach in teaching was also indicated in Ganapathy's study [41]. Employing qualitative case study in her research, the study showed that multimodal pedagogy was powerful in improving students' English competence, boosting their motivation in learning and facilitating various learning styles.

In terms of the language development, the teaching program could likely make students' English competence better. It can be seen from the excerpts below:

*I really like studying English this semester because I get lots of knowledge that I haven't got before. During this semester I know about multimodal text, the implementation of the multimodal text in video, in pictures, and in some articles, and how to make a good paragraph. My English is also improved. I learn how to communicate with people., this makes me more confidence in using English. (S1#Reflective journal May, 28, 2018)*

*From the first meeting to the last one, I learn many new things, many new vocabularies. The lesson is challenging yet interesting. We learn using many technology applications, we learn about multimodal texts, we also need to think and try harder to accomplish the tasks given. We should make digital mini-magazine in the form of multimodal texts, and also digital video project as our assignments. (S3#Reflective Journal, May 28, 2018)*

*This program is useful. I learn a lot of new things. I get many new vocabularies, I also get the knowledge of the meaning of image in texts. My English is getting better although it is not significant, because we only learn in a very short period of time. I enjoy the lesson very much. (Int#:S8)*

Several findings concerning with the impacts of multiliteracies/multimodal pedagogy implementation regarding language improvement indicate similar results. The study conducted by Lee, Ardeshiri, and Cummins revealed that computer-assisted multiliteracies program (CaMP) had the potential in developing students' communicative competence and improve their cultural and media literacies as well [28]. This program was set up to provide opportunities for students to interactively communicate using English in a natural way across diverse cultural and linguistic environments along with multimodal practices. The latest study on the impacts of the implementation of this pedagogy in students' learning was done by Coccetta [42]. She investigated the impacts of multimodal theory developed within Halliday's systemic functional framework on students' learning. This multimodal theory was integrated into a university syllabus for English text studies. The results indicated that the multimodal framework helped learners develop their multimodal communicative competence and develop learners' awareness on meaning making potential of different semiotic resources.

In regard students' suggestions and improvements to the teaching program, basically there are two suggestions proposed by the students. The first one is regarding the time needed to complete the tasks. Most students felt that the time given was too short and they needed longer time. They said that the tasks were challenging enough in that they should integrate and utilize technology in the project completion, and thus it took time. They had to do editing, cropping, finding the appropriate sound, images and other digital activities in the projects they made. Yet they admitted that doing such thing was interesting and fun as articulated by one of students below:

*The digital-multimodal projects that are assigned to us are quite challenging, but the time given to do the tasks is very limited. Actually, the tasks are interesting. Due to the time limit, we cannot perform our best. So, my suggestion for the next teaching program is that students should be given sufficient time in completing the tasks. (Int#:S16)*

The second suggestion articulated by most of students is related to insufficient explanation and exploration of the materials given by the teacher. They pointed out that the teacher only provided them with brief explanation about the English materials learnt. Overall, the students' suggestions were very valuable for better improvement and implementation of the teaching program.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to report the students' perspectives towards the multiliteracies pedagogy teaching program implemented in an ESP classroom in Indonesia. The study showed the students perceived the teaching program enjoyable, motivating, and engaging. This program also offers several potential benefits for students in enhancing their language skills development and technological skills as well. Despite the benefits, there remain limitations that prevent this pedagogy from being implemented particularly when it comes the time aspects. The findings suggest, that ESP teachers accordingly should reconsider and transform their pedagogical practices to accelerate to the fast-shifting advancement of technology and learners' patterns of thinking and characteristics to facilitate learning and knowledge construction.

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