

EFL Teachers' Perspective in Engaging Media and Multiliteracies During Distance Learning Policy

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ABSTRACT

Distance learning (DL) policy during the COVID-19 pandemic has urged teachers to engage multiliteracies and media to their teaching. By using a narrative inquiry approach to a junior high school EFL teacher and a senior high school EFL teacher regarding their teaching experience, this qualitative study aims to investigate EFL teachers' perspective on the use of media and multiliteracies in teaching English during DL. An analysis is done by looking at the situation, interaction, and continuity as well as the possibility of applying the principles of multiliteracies pedagogy by EFL teachers. The result showed that learners' socio-economic background has inevitably influenced the success of digital multiliteracies during DL. From the multiliteracies pedagogy principles, teachers are quite able to apply the situated practice and transformed practice but have few obstacles in applying overt instruction and critical framing. EFL teachers' expectations related to multiliteracy during DL raise implications for the need for equitable teacher participation in teachers' development programs and more government attention to educational facilities in all public and private schools.

Keywords: *Distance learning, EFL teachers, multiliteracies pedagogy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The DL (Distance Learning) policy as one of the ways to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has been issued and implemented almost all over the world, including Indonesia. The DL learning model is not a novel concept and is usually more often practiced for adult learners (Galusha, 1998). However, the existence of this pandemic constrained all teachers and students of various levels and ages to practice DL and make it a new norm in education. Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (No. 36962/2020) calls on teachers and students to learn from home by utilizing various online learning media. The official government circular also mentions several learning media as well as their web pages that can be accessed during DL, including *Rumah Belajar*, *Google G Suites for Education*, *Kelas Pintar*, *Microsoft Office 365*, *Quipper School*, *Sekolah Online Ruang Guru*, *Sekolahmu*, and *Zenius*. Besides these online media, teachers can also use Zoom, Google Classroom, and others. The government's call to use various online media

requires educational parties to raise awareness of digital literacy which is part of multiliteracies skills (Jing, 2016). Thus, the use of online media, particularly in EFL teaching, is one of the efforts to integrate multiliteracies in language teaching.

The New London Group (2000 as cited in Guth & Helm, 2012, p. 43) stated that educators must expand the scope of literacy towards multimedia technology. As technology develops, it is not only the way humans work that must adjust but also the way they participate in it (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). In the context of DL, EFL teaching will accordingly use various online media and virtual classrooms that not only change the way learning is common in traditional classroom, but also change how teachers work to create fun and meaningful multiliteracies learning by utilizing media.

Multiliteracies teaching is inseparable from the four principles of multiliteracies pedagogy introduced by the New London Group, namely situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008). Situated practice requires the

teacher as a learning mediator to involve students' real-life experiences as well as scaffolding to find and build meaning so that students can be motivated to learn. Overt instruction aims to make students truly understand what they are learning. In this case, the teacher needs to explain clearly and explicitly by using metalanguage related to the linguistic aspects of language to students if necessary. EFL teaching is not to dwell only on drilling or memorization activities (Wall, 2014), because multiliteracies teaching brings students to the stage of being able to construct meaning. Critical framing aims to enable students to think critically and relate the knowledge they have attained to social and cultural contexts. Transformed practice is an outcome of the integration of the three previous principles, namely when students can reproduce the knowledge and put it into practice. The four multiliteracies pedagogy are assumed to support 21st century learning that requires students to collaborate, think critically, and creatively. What needs to be underlined is that the four principles do not eliminate other pedagogical principles, but rather complement them to realize more effective multiliteracies teaching. Instead of being set to be applied solely and sequentially, the four principles are synergized in multiliteracies teaching.

Several studies have been conducted regarding teachers' understanding of multiliteracies application and the use of media in learning English. Boche (2014) found that teachers' understanding of multiliteracies needs to be supported by adequate training so that teachers can apply these fairly complex and evolving concepts in the classroom. Teachers' understanding of multiliteracies also needs to be developed and not only based on teaching experience. Heterogeneous EFL classes make multiliteracy teaching quite complex. A study by Shoffner et al. (2019) about multiliteracy in EFL secondary classroom found that teachers often had to pay attention to individual students' differences such as changing various teaching strategies by adjusting students' different learning styles or moving students' seats to support learning process. In addition, multiliteracies teaching is quite rare conducted at high school level yet more often at elementary level due to the frequency of elementary students' interaction with multimodal texts (Wall, 2014).

Other studies focused on teacher and students' perspectives on the use of online media such as Google Classroom (GC) (Megawati & Astutik, 2019). The result of this study indicated that the use of online teaching media alone is not enough to represent enjoyable learning for students. Students do not find any particular thing that

can improve their English language skills in the learning process using GC, so they need more interactive media in the use of GC. This is not surprising because EFL teaching with multiliteracies is closely related to multimodal aspects (Jing, 2016; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008) which combine various symbols such as text, audio, and visual to form meaning and convey it. Thus, EFL teaching no longer encompasses traditional reading and writing skills, but also multiliteracies skills related to reading with the integration of audio, spatial, visual, and other multimodal meaning-making resources (Song, 2012).

Considering that there are still few studies regarding multiliteracies at high school levels, and that previous studies focused on teachers' perspectives and application of multiliteracies pedagogy in traditional classrooms, this study seeks to fill the gap regarding EFL teachers' perspectives on multiliteracies in the context of distance learning in both junior high school and senior high school. This study aims to investigate EFL teachers' perspective on the use of media and multiliteracies in the distance learning context. This perspective will be seen from teachers' understanding of the concept of multiliteracies, their experience in engaging media and multiliteracies for teaching during the DL policy, and their expectations regarding the multiliteracies pedagogy. From that perspective, it will be scrutinized to what extent EFL teachers have tried to reflect the four principles of multiliteracies pedagogy into their teaching practice.

2. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a narrative inquiry approach. In the pedagogical research context, a narrative inquiry approach is usually carried out to explore the experience of a teacher or student about a phenomenon of learning in detail through stories that are delivered directly, and the results of the study are not to justify the truth but to present the reality on the ground as it is so that it opens the possibility for action by related parties (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The stories conveyed through this approach are not fruitless, but rather consist of pedagogical principles that are discussed and linked to situations that occur in the field. Then, the results are expected to be taken into consideration for multiliteracies learning in the context of distance learning in the future. In the process of collecting data, the researcher started by asking open questions to the respondent, listening carefully, clarifying the respondent's statement, and drawing conclusions from the experiences submitted by the respondent (Lindsay & Schwind, 2016).

Data of this qualitative research were derived from interview with two teachers who are graduates of English education programs from public universities and they both teach at the secondary level. The names of the two teachers were pseudonyms. The first teacher, Jia, teaches at junior high school and the second teacher, Haya, teaches at senior high school. Both have students with some different socio-economic backgrounds. Jia teaches at private schools while Haya teaches at both public and private schools.

Interviews with teachers were conducted by phone and lasted for approximately 1 hour. After obtaining the data of EFL teachers' perspective, the researcher analysed the results using an adaptation of the Boche (2014) narrative inquiry analysis with few adjustments. Boche divides his research analysis into three aspects, namely interaction, situation, and continuity. In this study, interview questions were developed according to interaction, situation, and continuity framework as well. Interaction analysis focuses on teachers' understanding of the concept of multiliteracies and the teacher's experience in using media during DL policy as well as embracing its challenges and successes that could reflect the teachers' efforts in applying multiliteracies pedagogy in DL context. Situation analysis focuses on the DL context and students' socio-economic background. Continuity analysis focuses on the teachers' perspective toward multiliteracies application of EFL teaching in the future.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The delivery of findings of this study begins with the elaboration of information from each teacher including their experience of conducting multiliteracies during DL policy and their future expectations, and then followed by a discussion of phenomena that arise from teachers' perspectives.

3.1. Jia

3.1.1. Jia's experience

Teaching junior high school students in a private school with high socio-economic backgrounds does not necessarily allow multiliteracies teaching to run smoothly. Jia revealed several factors that influenced the success of multiliteracies EFL teaching during DL. First, the domicile of students in some remote areas that might disrupt the effectiveness of online learning. Second, the lack of support from students' parents at home. Jia believes the success of DL depends on the involvement of the role of teacher, students, and also parents.

On the other hand, Jia's understanding of the concept of multiliteracies was quite good and she also claimed to have been accustomed to using media as part of digital literacy before DL was implemented.

"Multiliteracies in EFL learning requires me and students to not only study English texts or literature, but also the relevance of these texts to social and economic topics. So multiliteracies in EFL teaching should not be limited by certain topics and media. "

Jia considers that multiliteracies is very important in this 21st-century learning. She added that teaching and assessing English through media was a common thing before DL policy. For instance, she often asks her students to post assignments in the form of videos using Instagram application and mind-mapping assignments using Mindmaster application. Regarding the mind-mapping task, she claimed to be inspired by her students who proposed using visual media.

"When asking students to do mind-mapping, I asked them to use coloured pens since I thought they would like to use coloured pens like I do. I also think it will activate students' motoric skills. However, some of my students suggested using a concept map application that I didn't know before, such as Canva or Mindmaster. I think it's good and supports multiliteracy learning in this digital era more than using pencil and paper. "

Those learning applications continued to be used during the DL policy while adding some varieties of media for video conferencing such as Zoom and popular teaching media such as Google Classroom.

Jia found that teaching multiliteracies through video conferencing has confronted some challenges. She becomes more extra in preparing presentations in the PowerPoint format in which the multimodal aspects had to be considered as well. She also feels the urge to recurrently prepare video as an introduction to some topics she would discuss with her students. Jia believes that she no longer can rely solely on the use of textbook references as in face-to-face classroom learning in general yet believes that learning by combining media for multiliteracies is very important to increase students' motivation.

Regarding motivation, for Jia, there was an unexpected phenomenon that occurred during DL. She noticed that some students who are quite advanced in their academic achievement before DL was implemented became invisible during DL. She assumed that it was a

motivation problem of students who are not fully ready for multiliteracies learning in DL context, so she needs to continue to build students' motivation on a regular basis. In addition, she was also confronted with some students who lack confidence when they had to make a presentation via video conference.

"When I asked them to deliver a presentation via video conference, some students were unwilling because they didn't know how to do it and had never done any online presentation before. However, after they were motivated and guided, the result as well as other students' responses were good. We also held a question-and-answer session too. It seems like they are quite used to it and I think I will try it again."

Jia revealed that the intensity of using media for EFL multiliteracies learning is valuable for students to be more digitally literate. A variety of strategies also continue to be carried out by Jia to maintain students' motivation during DL, such as implementing group learning strategies and individual learning periodically. However, on the one hand, she feels a personal burden regarding the demands of the government and parents to always serve students as much as possible with good teaching preparation.

"Everyone says that teachers must design media as creatively as possible so that students will not get bored studying during DL. But, has anyone ever thought that teachers are also psychologically suppressed for they have to design their learning regularly in online platform because online distance learning also happens unexpectedly for teachers."

In applying multiliteracies pedagogy, Jia tries to fulfill the situated practice principle by increasing students' motivation. Not only that, she also built students' prior experience to integrate social and cultural aspects while constructing the meaning of a text.

"When I taught recount text about biography, I gave an example of Martin Luther King figure to raise the issue of racism that was in turmoil lately. Then I conducted a discussion to build prior knowledge by relating it to their experiences with racism. Since the background of my students was from upper economic families, on average they have been abroad and experienced this issue. There was a student who said that he had queued in one of the western countries but because he was Asian, his queue was ended in turn. After getting responses from students, it made it easier for me to invite them to develop the concept of critical thinking."

It shows that situated practice will direct the teacher to meet critical framing aspect. From critical framing, students will find it easier to do transformed practice.

However, the researcher identified that Jia had difficulties in applying another aspect of multiliteracies pedagogy, namely overt instruction. This was stated by Jia as follows:

"DL learning is very different from traditional learning in the way I have to give instructions and feedback. In traditional learning, I can easily help them when they have difficulty by approaching them personally, but I can't do it in DL. The solution that I can offer them is asking them to contact me personally via chat rooms or telephone when there is something to ask about the materials."

3.1.2. Jia's expectation

If this DL policy continues, she hopes to be able to improve fun multiliteracy learning for students because it is the key to successful DL for junior high school students. If the DL policy has ended, she will maintain the use of Google Classroom application because it is effective in providing instructions and assignments and conducting direct assessments. Google Classroom is also considered to be able to minimize technical matters such as the loss of assignments that are often used as reasons for students when not collecting assignments.

3.2. Haya

3.2.1. Haya's experience

Haya's experience of teaching in public and private high school made her have enough insight into teaching multiliteracies during DL. The first discussion is about Haya's experience teaching EFL with online media and the concept of multiliteracies in private school, then followed by her experience teaching in public school.

Regarding the use of media, Haya is more varied when teaching in private school. She uses applications such as Flipgrid to assess speaking skills rather than asking students to send videos of their speech to the WhatsApp application which consumes a lot of phone memory. She admitted that Flipgrid is helpful during DL because it could help her create an interactive learning atmosphere between students by talking through video. Besides Flipgrid, Haya also uses the Quizzes application to provide fun formative tasks. These applications strongly support digital literacy-based learning.

"For me, in order to achieve literacy skills such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and problem-solving in this era, people need to integrate various media with technology. Multiliteracies in EFL learning is very important because it can motivate students to learn, compared to when the teacher only gives lectures explaining some concepts. Moreover, multiliteracies with media also combines audio and visual aspects so that students could be motivated that at least they want to try new literacy."

In teaching EFL and giving assignments, Haya claimed to integrate four language skills and a combination of various media. Haya gave an example when she taught descriptive text, she started by explaining the concept via video conference, after that asking students to make a video describing something with the Flipgrid application that supports speaking skills. In private high school, she felt more successful in implementing multiliteracies with media. Some students enjoy learning with the media so much that they produce something beyond her expectation as an EFL teacher.

"One of my students created their own YouTube channel which contained some English assignment videos. He even added Indonesian subtitles to make it easier for others to learn English when watching it. There are also some of my students when it came to learn about Song, took the initiative to use musical instruments such as piano or guitar at their home. Their presentation during the video conference became more creative and interactive and this exceeded my expectations."

Despite the success, DL is inseparable from various obstacles. Haya felt that the feedback she provided was less optimal. In traditional learning, after explaining the material, she can immediately conduct an evaluation or do a personal scaffolding. While in DL, feedback is limited by time and space. Besides, at times when she could use to correct student assignments and give written feedback was confined because it was often taken up to prepare the next meeting's online teaching material. As a result, students experience problems understanding the material without adequate feedback. Another obstacle stems from students' motivation. Haya said there were times when students felt bored studying online, so she argued that building students' awareness became an important task during DL.

Regarding Haya's experience in implementing multiliteracies in public school, she acknowledged that it was not very effective due to the low student socio-

economic backgrounds. This is not too daunting for her because before the DL policy was implemented, public schools were also not accustomed to implementing digital media-based multiliteracies. Limited digital facilities provided by public school is one of the causes. She can also understand this considering the economic background of her students who do not have their own gadgets and do not have a quota to go online.

These problems cause her unable to teach with video conference. Instead, she uses Google Classroom to post assignments or sometimes uses Quizzes to take formative grades and to make learning a little more varied and enjoyable. Her students also admitted that they enjoyed learning with media because it was their first experience interacting with digital learning media.

"In my opinion, the positive side of DL for students is that they can understand that learning can be done everywhere and inevitably they are required to be digital literate. The concept of literacy applications in learning that has been echoed for a long time by the government has become more attainable during this DL. Although from one side, feedback is difficult to give which impacts on the students' lack of understanding about the material. Students in this public school also tend to do rudimentary assignments so it is difficult for me to help students achieve the minimum assessment criteria set by the school."

3.2.2. Haya's expectation

For Haya, multiliteracies application with media during DL is a challenge not only for students but also for teachers. She hopes to continue to develop her capability by attending some teachers' development program independently on social media because school has limited similar training program.

If DL has ended, she plans to be able to maintain the use of Google Classroom since it is easier for her to assess and correct students' work, and she no longer has to deal with stacks of potentially missing student assignment papers.

3.3. Discussions

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that multiliteracies teaching with media during DL is inevitably affected by students' socio-economic background. Teachers who teach students from middle to lower economic backgrounds are quite difficult to integrate media to teach multiliteracies. However, this

can be overcome by keeping up with students' motivation. As Haya said when teaching at public school:

"Although my students in public schools do not have adequate facilities to support digital multiliteracies, they have strong motivation to learn. So, when they try to use various English learning applications, they are very enthusiastic, and there I feel my teaching is more meaningful."

Meanwhile, students from high economic backgrounds tend to have problems with their learning motivation and this could be due to the long period time of studying from home. However, both teachers share similar strategies to overcome students' lack of motivation problems by using various online media and designing fun learning. This is inseparable from the teacher's understanding of the concept of multiliteracies. In line with Guth & Helm (2012) which states that learning traditional literacy in the era of technology is not sufficient without expanding the scope of its application towards digital literacy.

Another factor influencing the use of media for multiliteracies is the teachers' participation in teachers' development programs or training. Sufficient training will help teachers manage digital learning more efficiently and affect their readiness in DL. As Jia said that she had experienced psychological pressure because of the demands of parents and schools to create enjoyable learning as possible. For her, teaching adolescents requires more effort in terms of building motivation. Jia also claimed she did not understand how to measure the success of the multiliteracies teaching she was trying to do, as she said:

"I don't know how to measure if I have succeeded in teaching EFL using multiliteracies with media during DL. Is it by looking at my students' grade? Is it when they are comfortable with my teaching? Is it when they claim to understand the material that I delivered? "

Lastly, overall, there are similarities in the effort to apply multiliteracies pedagogy principles from the perspective of Jia and Haya. The principle that both of them agreed was quite successful was the transformed practice in which their students made an unexpected jump in developing the assigned English task. This is in line with many studies that show that digital literacy greatly influences the success of learners' autonomy (Benson, 2013). Another less problematic applied principle that involve teachers during multiliteracies teaching is situated practice where both teachers have to

always provide motivation and actively invite students' prior knowledge to make them willing to engage with the learning process.

However, both teachers seem to have obstacles in applying the principles of overt instruction and critical framing. That is because the DL context is limited in space and time so it affects the ineffectiveness of giving feedback and giving explicit instructions that must be done repeatedly in order to make students able to truly understand what they are learning. Both teachers also hoped to continue to be able to improve the ability of multiliteracies teaching by attending various teacher training.

4. CONCLUSION

Teachers' perspective on EFL learning based on multiliteracies and media during DL is inseparable from the factors of students' socio-economic background, teacher's teaching experience, and participation in the teacher's professional development program. Although confronted by various challenges in applying multiliteracies, teachers still try to fulfil the four multiliteracies pedagogy. Both teachers were quite successful in applying the principles of situated practice and transformed practice but were less optimal in applying the principles of overt instruction and critical framing. However, both teachers think that it is not considered significant and can be overcome by doing scaffolding to students.

This study is limited in terms of the number of participants and the simplicity of the method. Further research is needed to investigate the application of multiliteracy in EFL teaching from the four principles of multiliteracies pedagogy in the comparison of traditional learning and distance learning contexts. It is also useful to conduct relevant research by involving students' perspectives and considering conducting overtime research to see the consistency of teachers in applying the principles of multiliteracies pedagogy.

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