

# An Autobiography of Novice Teacher in Using Multimodality for Teaching Reading to Young Learners

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## Abstract

This study is the author's autobiography as a novice teacher in teaching fifth-grade students with multimodality. I have been teaching young learners for five years in one of an elementary school in Indonesia. Until this day, I am still in the quest to find the best method to develop young learners' reading proficiency. I also want to change their perspective about reading. It is necessary to create a reading process which is enjoyable and not boring in the classroom. Young learners who were born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital natives and non-traditional learners. Multimodality consists of several different modes. Each mode is meaningful and has a role. As a teacher, I could design each mode based on her students' needs and what they were familiar with.

## Subject Areas

Reading

## Keywords

Autobiography, multimodality, reading, young learners

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is one of the international surveys which tests mathematics, science, and literacy. The members of this survey are countries all around the world. They are more than 70 countries, and 5 of them are from Southeast Asia; Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. From the result of PISA 2015, Singapore is first with 551, Malaysia is 18<sup>th</sup> with 518, Vietnam is 21<sup>st</sup> with 502, Thailand is 55<sup>th</sup> with 415, and Indonesia is 52<sup>nd</sup> with 395. From 72 countries, Indonesia was on 63<sup>rd</sup>. From this result, Indonesian has low result in mathematics, and science also has low desire to read. Literacy is not about how the country escapes from illiterate status, but it is one of the conditions that a country has to fulfill to compete with others in the job market.

Scott and Ytreberg (2004) shared that books are like a door of the world to young children and make reading an enjoyable activity is a vital part of the language experience. Not only enjoying the process

of reading but also making a habit of reading. It is not an easy task for a teacher to change their students to become a habitual reader. Based on researcher experience, reading class for young learners is very challenging. It is challenging to make them sit down and read a book moreover to enjoy this activity. Young learners tend to have concise attention and concentration span; also, they like to ask many questions. They still need others to complete the puzzle so that the meaning is acceptable or them.

Klein in Aldabbus (2012) said that young learners change their mood very quickly so that it is not easy to make them sit for several minutes. However, it will be different when they find something that attracts their attention. They will have a strong will to experience it. Teachers use it as their chance to engage young in the teaching and learning process. The teacher needs to introduce the happiness of reading and how reading is enjoyable. Young learners need something colorful and visually attractive. So it will be more enticing if the books are full color and have some representative pictures. It helps students to understand the book clearer.

Walsh (2010) shared that multimodality is meaning-making activities that happen over the reading, viewing, understanding, responding to and producing, and interacting with multimedia and digital texts. It consists of oral and gestural modes of talking, listening, and dramatizing as well as writing, designing, and producing such texts. The image, words, sound, and movement within texts are modes. Processing of these modes coincide and is often cohesive and synchronous. Sometimes some specific modes dominate others. It also helps teachers to manage their classroom by using videos to attract students' attention and use other modes to assist students in understanding the topic (Carpenter, 2016).

The students who were born in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are digital natives who are familiar with the changing in technology. Students prefer to use digital communication, such as pictures and videos in the teaching and learning process. It is easy for them to access and understand it. It also provides them with different sources to gives them more knowledge about a particular topic. Students not only read it but also visualize it from the video. Those sources do not have a limitation, unlike printed material. However, it also gives teacher effect which we have to face. How far digital technologies can be integrated within literacy activity without reducing the benefit and the importance of the rich, imaginative and cultural knowledge that is derived from books

Sankey et al., (2010) Explained how multimodality improves undergraduate students classroom situation. It had a high impact on their motivation, and it encourages students to learn more. Marchetti and Cullen (2015) stated that a multimodal approach in the classroom is a source of creativity for both teachers and students and how each mode correlates not only to contemporary society but to specific cognitive processes. This combination allows for creativity and flexibility in teacher-student interaction and enhances the learning environment. Cárcamo et al. (2017) explain how multimodality gave significant benefits for vocabulary acquisition among 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th graders from two semi-public schools. This study used visual aids, and task-based approach to help students learned new words. Bao (2017) wrote about how multimodality is used to help undergraduate students who are lacked in motivation to read. These students have good ability in English, but they found reading is boring.

In this study, the writer as the English teacher explained how multimodality approach applied in teaching reading for young learners and how multimodality helps young learners enjoy the reading process, and the research is in narrative inquiry design. Most of the studies which have been conducted regarding multimodality were for higher students and pre-service or in-service teacher also most of the studies were in case study design or experimental. Multimodality approach for teaching young learners and in narrative inquiry is still rare, especially in Indonesia.

## 2. METHOD

Sikes and Gale (2006) stated that human beings are storytelling creatures who compose narratives to describe their doings as well as to describe their past, present, and imagined world experiences. The main strength of narrative inquiry is located in its core on how people use stories to make others understand of their experiences in areas of inquiry where it is essential to understand phenomena from the eyes of those who experience them (Barkhuizen, Benson, and Chick, 2014).

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) said that narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience, and educational experience should be investigated narratively. The narrative inquiry also builds on the significance of narrative as a way of making meaning and views. Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chick (2014) narrative inquiry is a suitable design for a researcher who wants to study in language teaching and learning field because it is constructive for us to understand the inner mental worlds of language teachers and learners and the nature of language teaching and learning as a social and educational activity. There are several genres of narrative, such as a memoir, biography, autobiography, diaries, archival documents, medical records, folk ballads, photographs, drawings, and other visual images. Even though it has several forms “narrative is always strongly autobiographical (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

Elbaz-Luwisch (2010) shared the advantages of autobiography. It helps to clarify teachers’ own story, as teachers’ reflection platform, and as communication tools in other teachers’ professional development. However, sharing autobiography can be risky. It exposes the teachers’ vulnerability side.

The writer is an elementary school English teacher in one of an elementary school in Indonesia. The teacher has taught in this school for five years. For this academic year, she taught first and 5th-grade students, but for this study, she chose her 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students. The fifth-grade students consisted of 37 students, 22 girls, and 15 boys. This class was a different class. They come from different family background and beliefs. They have their own opinion and do not hesitate to show it up. Most of them have been learned English since kindergarten, but their English ability is very average. Most of them are shy to show off their ability. Fifth-grade students also prefer to read the short and easy text because the long text is difficult for them. It also makes them bored quickly. Most of the students have a limited vocabulary. They need guidance to grasp the meaning of the text. When the teacher gave instruction, most of them need time to understand it, and the teacher had to repeat it 2 or 3 times for the students.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Young learners are different from other students. They are very passionate about doing a particular activity that is new and interesting in their eyes, but they are easy to lose motivation to do it. They are also easy to get distracted with other activities, and it is not easy to get them to sit for quite a long time (Aldabbus, 2012). It is difficult for them to stay doing one particular thing. They also tend to lose enthusiasm in doing things if they face difficulties. They will move to other activities which they think is more comfortable.

It is challenging for the teacher to make them comfortable and enjoy reading activities and to make them having fun while doing it. Making young learners like the lesson and happily doing the activities is not accessible. The teacher needs to know what the students like and familiar with. After young learners enjoy the process, the teacher focuses then moves to enrich the students' vocabulary. They need to understand the text. Then teachers help them weave the meaning of the word and analyzes each aspect in the text to make the meaning of the text. Teaching reading to young learner means the teacher has to help young learners derive meaning as well as analyze and synthesize what they have read in order to fulfill the purpose of reading: reading for pleasure and information (Linse & Nunan, 2005).

Teachers must find a suitable method to teach them. Most of the teachers still use the traditional teaching model, which is teacher-centered. This model is hardly awakening students' interest, and the learning efficiency is low. It only helps students' to feel bored. That is why the needs to improve the teaching method, especially in reading class, are desperately essential (Bao, 2017). By implementing the effective reading method, teachers can lessen at least some of reading difficulties that students facing (Morgan, 2013)

Multimodality consists of meaningful modes which connect audio, visual, text, picture, video, film, etc into a process that help students understand certain materials deeper. Each mode help students to construct the meaning. It also has its role, and there are always reasons why this mode is selected. Each mode makes the students to do a different type of work in order to understand (Kress et al., 2001). Kress also added that images, sound, animations, and other modes that play essential roles in children's everyday meaning-making should also be standard modes in the education environment. It is also essential to take into consideration that each mode has its limitations and opportunities, meaning that images do what they do and writing does what it does, and in combination, they can do a different thing (Kress et al., 2008). Moreno and Mayer (2007) share that multimodal learning environments use different modes to serve as knowledge, for example, verbal and non-verbal (pictures). These different presentation modes are necessary to attract students' different sensory modalities (visual and auditory).

#### 4.1. Multimodality in Reading Class

##### **Pre-reading activity**

In the pre-reading activity, the teacher gave the students several pictures about the topic and asked the students their opinion of it. The teacher would use videos when we were in during activity. It

usually happened because the topic is comfortable and familiar with them. Below is one of the episodes in pre-reading activity in her classroom:

Today's topic was shopping. I gave my students the pictures of clothes and its price. Showing pictures at the beginning of the lesson always make them excited, and they knew it was time to get serious. These pictures gave them so much effect. Moreover, from these pictures, they could guess the topic. I asked them how to read money. Some of them had difficulties in differentiating a hundred and thousand and where they had to put "and." (January 30th, 2019)

However, on another occasion, the students needed several pictures and videos in pre-reading activity as a background knowledge because the topic was not in their daily life, and it still foreign for them. When the students faced with this type of topic, not only pictures and videos but also teacher's guidance was needed.

This time I needed more than pictures. This topic was an endangered animal, and it was complicated for them. I showed several pictures of an endangered animal. Most of my students did not know what it was. They said those animals were foreign for them. They only realized what they were when I told my students the name of it in Bahasa, Indonesia. Then I played a video, this video told them about why those animals became extinct and the process of trading it. (April 16th, 2019).

The use of pictures and videos as necessary for young learners because it was used to brainstorming and to make sure that they know what they were going to learn. Young learners need concrete objects which they can see or touch when they learn new things (Cameron, 2001). It happens because they cannot understand abstract ideas which foreign for them. If teachers try to explain abstract things to them, it will only create confusion.

### **During reading**

In this activity, the teacher used short text with easy to understand vocabulary. The teacher used digital text and texts which was available in the students textbook. When discussing the vocabulary, she wrote it on the whiteboard than the students, and she looked it together in the dictionary. She did not give them the answer right away because she wanted them to search it up in the dictionary and became independent learners. Teachers are not the walking dictionary. She only corrected it if the meaning did not suitable for the text context.

Based on the teacher's experience, young learners would lose their motivation to read or learn the text if the text were too wordy. They preferred to have pictures or videos to visualize the text. In this activity, she used videos which represent the text and the topic of the video. Video provides new vocabulary, structure, and function which improve language learners' necessary skills. The combination of visual and audio help the students to understand the topic better. (Julinar, 2019). The usage of videos and pictures in the classroom is beneficial because the student can visualize the content and give students the motivation to join the process (Willmot et al., 2012).

Below is one of the episodes during reading activity in her classroom when the students worked in a group. In this group activity, she used more complex and longer text:

After dividing them into several groups, I showed them pictures and words. Each group had to choose one of the pictures and list the words which suitable to reflect the picture. I took these words from the text which they were going to learn. I allowed them to look into their dictionaries. When they have done with it, I gave them an envelope based on the pictures they choose. I also provided them with questions for each text, and I put it inside their envelope. While they did it, I went around the classroom and tried to have a conversation with each group about the text. I did this to know their opinion about the text and the difficulties that they are facing. I tried to provide the text that they like and suitable for them without leaving the reading goal, which we had been made. (January 30th, 2019)

This group work allowed understanding and got closer to the students. The students tended to be more open when the distance between them and the teacher was closer. Some of the students were afraid and shy to show their opinion or to ask questions if the teacher was in front of the class. They thought their friends would point their fingers to them if their words were wrong. The teacher always tries never to say “wrong “ or “ incorrect” every time the student's answers were not suitable for mine. The teacher thought that if it were said, the students' chance to be active would be gone. It could create trauma for them; then, the motivation to answer the question was vanish.

#### **Post-reading**

After the students did the group work, her students shared what they knew about the text to their friends. They could use the questions which the teacher also prepared inside the envelope as guidance to what they had to share. She used several ways in this activity. Below was the description of one occasion when the students shared what they knew about the text to their friends:

I asked two members of each group to stay at their place then other students who were not staying would go around the class visited several groups. Those two members who stayed would present and explain what the text about to the visitors. The visitors would write down what the text about based on the explanation. I also provided the form that they needed to fill as the result of their group work. I asked them to try to communicate in English. (February 20th, 2019)

When the students did this activity, the teacher would go around the class to check whether they communicated in English or not. She also interviewed several groups and used English to communicate. She wanted to give her students an example of how to do it. Every time they did this activity, the students became very loud in talking. Sometimes the other teacher asked her what she and her students were doing that made their class became so noisy. She said that they played the game and her students got too excited.

The students had to write down the report based on the activities in the group. There were also two ways to share the report. They wrote down the result, or they report it orally. When they did it orally, they record their presentation with their phone and sent it to me. It was video, not a voice recording. Below was the teacher's impression of their work:

I asked them to make a group wall magazine, and then they had to present it by record their presentation. When I saw their videos, the result beyond my expectation. One of the groups hid their cheating paper behind the wall magazine. Other group wrote down what they were going to say and someone held it behind the camera. (April 30th, 2019)

The teacher gave the students the freedom of how to do their presentation. Their presentations were beyond the teacher's expectation. When she saw their presentation, she knew their effort to do it. It can be seen clearly how creative they were. They still did not realize that they could do everything substantially without pushing them.

Teaching reading is very challenging for the teacher because the hunting process to find a method to make reading enjoyable is not easy. The students had already had this thought that reading activities were dull and they could not do many exciting activities in it. The process to choose the activities is also not easy because one classroom consists of more than 25 students with different characteristic and preference. The students like it when we play a game or watch the video. However, it also can be annoying, and there will be no improvement if we only do this. Not all of the games are suitable for the students. The teacher has to modify it. When playing the game, the students were very hype, and they spoke in a louder voice, which could disturb another classroom, and not all the classroom understood and accepted this. It also needs some time to make students understand the instruction because when they know that we will play the game, they tend to become very noisy, and they do not pay attention to the instructions. Making more than 25 students keep quiet, and stay focus was not smooth.

The teacher's first year as a teacher to young learners was not easy. There were some obstacles. She had this image of her ideal students and thought that every student would be like that. However, it was wrong. It was so tricky only to get their attention. They always busy and prefer to do it than paying attention to me. This was the biggest challenge. They were individuals who had their preference and style. Multimodality gave her the freedom to design her activities (modes), which suited her students' preferences. She could freely mix and match several activities which were their favorite so that they were having fun and enjoy the teaching and learning process. These several modes also helped me to control the class. Young learners could quickly get bored if the activity were the same and monotonous. If they started to wander around, too noisy, and unwilling to do the task, it meant the teacher should change the activities (Thomson, 2001). It was necessary to make them comfortable and enjoy the class because it could give them a positive feeling toward English so that they kept learning English for the rest of their lives (Schindler, 2006).

### **Students' Feedback**

The teacher asked the students to write their opinion about her teaching using multimodality, her strength, and weakness. She also had a conversation with them one by one. She went around the class not only to check their understanding but also to have a little conversation. She and the students made these conversations in a group or individual. She also asked them about the modes in her reading class. The teacher explained to them what the modes are. For them, modes are activities which her students do in our classroom. Below was one of her student's opinion:

My students felt happy when they could do various activities and not only stay in their chair. They thought those activities were entertaining and challenging. They also thought those activities helped them focus on the lesson. (March 22nd, 2019)

The teacher made the class activities very packed, and she thought that those activities would make them lose their will to study because there were several modes or activities which have a complicated step and could drain their energy. However, it was not; the students thought it gave them effect to focus and made them deliver their energy wisely.

When the teacher asked about pictures and videos which she used in reading class, they gave a very positive response. They thought that it was constructive to visualize the text about. It attracted their attention and made them want to know more about the text. It was easier for them to figure out what the words of the text mean by watching the videos and the pictures. Those gave them significant impact. It made them remember the words easily because an exciting thing always lingers in their mind for a long time. Below was one of her student's explanation about the use of picture in the classroom;

The picture is beneficial. It gives us the visual of the text. However, I think the videos give a more significant impact. It explains what the text about. At the end of it, we have to answer the questions and do the project so we must still read the text. (KA; April 5th, 2019)

The students thought that pictures and videos also gave them the spirit to begin the lesson. Before the lesson began, most of the students were feeling sleepy, but the pictures and videos helped them to stay awake and focus. Below was other students opinion;

The pictures and videos not only give us the core of the text, but it also attracts our attention. We had the class in the afternoon. We were tired and sleepy, but it had a very colorful visual, so it made us focus and curious. It washed away our sleepiness and tiredness. Our desire to learn and read is also increased. (RD; April 25th, 2019)

The students were relieved and happy about the usage of it. Some of them thought that videos gave more impact and helped them understand the text more accessible than pictures. However, videos could become obstacles for several students. They found it hard to understand what the native speaker said. Not all of the videos had a subtitle in Bahasa Indonesia though the words were straightforward and easy. When native pronounce it, it became different and made them confused.

I do not understand the full content of the videos. I pick it up piece by piece. It does not have a subtitle in Bahasa Indonesia, so it is a lit bit difficult. However, I like the use of videos at least it makes the class more alive. (AF; March 13th, 2019)

The teacher intentionally did not include a subtitle and used easy and short videos with easy vocabularies and clear pronunciations from the natives so that her students got used to it. She wanted them to not depend on the subtitle, and their ears got used to listening to how native speaker speak. She thought it would greatly help them to improve their English ability. Also, when she thought one skill, she could not leave other skills because one skill supports others.

From the students' feedback, the teacher realized that her students were modern teaching model students who prefer to be active. They like to use several of their sensory modes in the teaching and learning process. Multimodal learning environments allow instructional elements to be presented in more than one sensory mode (visual, aural, written). In turn, materials that are presented in a variety of presentation modes may lead learners to perceive that it is easier to learn and improve

attention, thus leading to improved learning performance; in particular for lower-achieving students (Moreno & Mayer, 2007). Consequently, students may become more self-directed, interacting with the various elements housed in these environments.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It is crucial to make the students like the lesson. When they like it, teaching them the lesson will become easier. Multimodality gives a significant effect not only for students but also for the teacher. It supports the teacher to convey the lesson, and it changes students' opinion that reading is boring. Both teacher and students are having fun and enjoy the reading lesson. Yes, we read books and texts, but the activities to understand what its message can be charming. Teachers can freely design the modes depend on their students' needs. It does not always use pictures and videos. Teachers use others to make modes as long as it is suitable for the students. With multimodality, students can experience many activities which are suitable with their learning style and preferences which support their ability to understand the books and the texts. It is essential to make students like the subject. When they like it, teaching them the subject will become easier.

Multimodality is not only used in teaching reading. It can be used to teach all four skills in English. This is very helpful for teachers who are confused to design activities in the classroom. There are still many things that can be explored. This study only explained a small part. When she wrote this, she realized she still has many flaws in her teaching. It made her do reflective on her teaching practices, starting from the first time she taught elementary school five years ago. This taught her many lessons to become a better teacher.

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