



A narrative inquiry into the cultivation of EFL students' critical thinking skills through multimodal texts

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a story of two female undergraduate students in learning speaking with multimodal texts to elevate their critical thinking skills. Specifically, this study tried to investigate their lived story and experience in learning with multimodal texts following with the analysis activity to foster their critical thinking skill. In addition, their perceptions towards the use of multimodality and the benefits of multimodality were also portrayed. The study was carried out in a speaking class of Foreign Language for Specific Purposes (FLSP) subject in one of private universities in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The materials taught consisted of e-picture of advertisement shared via *WhatsApp* group and YouTube videos about advertisement. This study employed qualitative method with a narrative inquiry. The study findings reveal that students interviewed had positive attitudes towards learning English with multimodal texts. Moreover, the use of multimodality benefits students to raise their awareness on critical thinking. The results of study contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the use of multimodality for speaking purposes.

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Introduction

The 21st century education calls for equipping the students with the skills to be active, productive, and responsible. With this set of preparations, students can have a positive impact on their environment and influence the future. In the long run, students who are well prepared can become the agent of change. The skills required are including cognitive and metacognitive skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, self-regulation, etc.), social and emotional skills (empathy, self-efficacy, etc.), and practical and physical skills (information and communication technology) (McLaren, 2015). Being literate in this age requires critical

thinking skills that enable students to think ethically, evaluate critically numerous information, and develop reasoning strategies for presented information (Mills et al., 2022).

Critical thinking is universally interpreted as a term which reflects higher level of thinking and should be owned by individual. A term of critical thinking is often defined in numerous definitions with different versions and point of views. For example, Bobkina and Stefanova (2016) define critical thinking as a knowledge of the methods of local inquiry and reasoning. This means that students with a good critical thinking skill are able to think about how they understand something in a logical and sensible way. Rahimi and Sajed (2014) view critical thinking as a necessary skill which requires individual to be aware of the identities, power, and voice. Simply put, critical thinking is crucial skill for individual which related to the process of someone's thinking to identify and evaluate arguments, evidence, and conclusions.

The need for cultivating critical thinking in Indonesian's students is paramount because their critical thinking ability is relatively low (Atayeva, 2019). The most popular evidence is from the result of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015 which showed that Indonesia science literacy score is 403. This reflects that Indonesian students' skills in answering critical and logical questions are still insufficient. Several studies to investigate Indonesian students' critical thinking have documented that students' critical thinking was likely at the average level (Elisanti et al., 2018; Haridza & Irving, 2017; Saputri et al., 2018). This is supported by a study conducted by Indah and Kusuma (2016) which argues that there are several factors that affect the low level of critical thinking skills of Indonesian students, namely the language proficiency, assessment methods, motivation, support at home, prior linguistic knowledge, learning environment, teaching strategies, comprehensible input, students personality, age, and comfort in their country of residence.

Importantly, critical thinking refers to an ability of the thinking required in higher education because the higher education students are supposed to reflect higher level of thinking. Therefore, this skill has been highly encouraged by educators to allow students having critical value and the sense of creativity. As a result, students who know how to analyse and critique ideas will be able to make connections of what they are learning, see knowledge as applicable in a daily life, and assess their styles, strength, and weakness of their learning (Tathahira, 2020). However, many lecturers in university claimed that students are unlikely to have and use their critical thinking competencies sufficiently in doing both oral and written tasks. It is in line with a study by Nuroh et al. (2020) which assert that students are regularly found to be not enthusiastic to comment on the other's ideas seriously and tend to simply accept experts' ideas due to the inability of the students to think critically and optimally in their previous education level. In fact, some English lecturers have modified the learning into more modern and more student-centred, yet some still carried out the traditional learning and struggled to apply suggested method from the government.

In teachers' perspective, a number of research report that teachers are still having difficulties in fostering critical thinking in the classroom contexts. Teachers often missed the opportunity to take advantage on their questioning strategy to improve students' critical thinking skills (Defianty & Wilson, 2020). In fact, teachers still consider fostering students' critical thinking to be challenging task (Zainudin et al., 2019), and therefore it is little surprise that students will also have limited understanding of critical thinking (Mbato, 2019; Zainudin et al., 2019). However, rigorous attempts have been made to foster critical thinking skills for

Indonesian students. Saputra et al. (2019), for example, found that a jigsaw problem-based collaborative learning model was effective to improve students' critical thinking. Similarly, Kurniawati et al. (2020) also reported that critical literacy pedagogy (CLP) can enhance students' engagement with critical thinking. Therefore, teachers should find the suitable method to incorporate critical thinking into teaching and learning.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in discussing critical thinking skill. This skill is claimed as the 21st century skill and so widely used in educational contexts, including in language learning. Particularly in Indonesia, thinking skill has become the purpose of national education system as it is outlined in Indonesia national curriculum (BSNP, 2013). Moreover, this critical thinking in a number of research is considered a strategic skill to face a rapidly changing world, to improve the quality of individual's life (Ab Kadir, 2017), and to prepare the future (Cosgrove, 2011). Thus, preparing individual with critical thinking skills prepares an individual to be able to differentiate and evaluate the information they receive and to face problems with various possible solutions (Roche, 2014).

However, preparing an individual with critical thinking skills might not be an easy task. It should be started with continuous process. The policies from Indonesian government should also be hand-in-hand with the implementation in the school system (Ab Kadir, 2017). Moreover, classroom teaching and learning activities should also be carried out to facilitate the process of thinking critically. This will be more crucial along with the technological advancement. As the use of Internet has become ubiquitous, the challenge to create more tech-savvy learning and interactive classroom has become prominent. Therefore, it influenced the learning design and teaching method to be applied in the classroom.

One alternative to integrate digital learning that fosters students critical thinking is through a multimodal text. The researchers have documented several findings on the use of multimodal text in teaching and learning to improve critical thinking. Lee (2014), for example, conducted a case study to explore the effect of multimodal approach in English literature over two consecutive years. As a result, the students were found to think critically about the contents and to have improved their ability to use various techniques to understand the materials. In the same vein, Oldakowski (2014) reported that multimodal assignments provided improvement of students' thinking and understanding of the content.

Multimodal text refers to a combination of two or more modes of meaning in the communication practices such as written language and oral language, visual and audio representation, tactile representation, gestural representation, and spatial representation to convey meaning (Martens et al., 2012; Mills et al., 2022). Multimodal texts include comic, picture book, newspapers, brochures, print advertisements, posters, PowerPoint slides, e-posters, YouTube video, social media, etc. This kind of text is considered as the 21st century multimodal texts that require the use of various digital tools to facilitate ways of meaning, doing, relating, thinking and being (Jones & Hafner, 2012).

To make learning more attractive in speaking class, the use of non-printed multimodal text as the resource was implemented during the teaching and learning process. Unsworth (2008) states that multimodal text consists of more than one mode (a kind of meaningful sign or symbol), so the meaning of the text can be conveyed through the combination of modes. This means that multimodal text can be understood by bringing the different modes included in the text altogether. In this case, students will be given non-printed multimodal text in the

form of e-picture shared through WhatsApp group which includes image and writing representations dan YouTube video which includes audio and visual representations.

However, the multimodal-based approach English teaching is not common in Indonesian classroom practices (Drajati et al., 2018). It can be seen from the last two Indonesian curriculum versions (KTSP and K-13) which highlight on language-based literacy to be the main concern of English pedagogy (Novianti, 2018). However, Indonesia government has issued a new initiative to accommodate multimodality in national education through School Literacy Movement (SLM) policy which encourages the integration of multimodality into school pedagogy, including English language teaching and learning process (Ditjendikdasmen, 2017; MoEC, 2017). At present, the challenges of its implementation have occurred, particularly in classroom-level pedagogical practices. Although the multimodal policy has been initiated in 2015, the government is now still working on how to enact this policy more effectively by teachers in classroom pedagogy (Sidik, 2022).

In EFL reading context, it is no exception that multimodal texts are employed in the classroom to improve students' performance. Cahyaningati and Lestari (2018), for example, revealed that the use of multimodal text can enhance reading skill of engineering students. The students who are taught by employing non-printed multimodal text in extensive reading showed the higher score that students taught by Linear text (LT). In a similar vein, Kustini et al. (2020), for example, revealed that the use of multimodal pedagogy in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) class is an effective instructional method for digital literacy learning and has improved students' digital literacy.

Students were assigned to complete related multimodal tasks such as creating digital mini magazine and having digital video presentation. At the end, they were able to evaluate, analyse, and interpret the information. In the different yet special setting, multimodal text used in English classroom of hard-of-hearing learners could ease the teacher to help students' performance in reading comprehension and allow students to participate more actively in the classroom (Ikasari et al., 2019).

Although there are several studies related to the use of multimodal text, which most of them showed the positive trend, there have been limited study concerned on the use of multimodal text to foster students critical thinking. In the teachers' point of view, fostering critical thinking for students is still challenging. Therefore, this present study will particularly look how students feel and experience about learning English using multimodal text (picture, advertisements, and YouTube short video) related to their critical thinking skill. Students are interviewed with in-depth questions related to their feeling and experience. Based on their answers, a narrative inquiry is employed to explore how they perceive multimodal text learning in the classroom. Thus, a clear description of students' feeling and experience in EFL context using multimodal text can be well elaborated.

Method

Research design

This research is a narrative inquiry study to investigate students' perceptions and story in using multimodal text for learning English to foster their critical thinking skills. According to

Barkhuizen et al. (2013), narrative inquiry includes storytelling and research together either by using stories as research data or by using storytelling as a tool for data analysis.

Setting and participants

This research was conducted in a private university in Malang for the first semester students who joined speaking class in Foreign Language for Specific Purposes (FLSP) subject. It also was conducted on the 11th -13th meetings in December 2022. The participants of this research are two female undergraduate students with range age to 18-20 years old. The participants were selected under some consideration of their speaking activity.

Data collection

In a data collection process, the interview method was used to collect narrative data with open and semi-structured questions. Since this study is to uncover students' personal experiences towards their learning using multimodal texts for developing their critical thinking, it used a personal interview, not a focus group interview. The interviews were also digitally recorded. During the interview, the researcher also wrote notes about her observation and interpretation of the story.

Data analysis

The analysed data was primarily from the transcription of interview. Additional data came from the researcher's notes was also analysed. Data from oral interview are analysed by processing and transcribing oral interpretations.

Findings and discussion

Implementation on the use of multimodal text to foster critical thinking

Students had speaking lesson in the week 11-13. The materials given was analysing the advertisement given by the lecturer. Initially, the lecturer sent e-pictures of advertisement and a link of YouTube video to watch through WhatsApp group. After receiving the pictures, looking at them closely and watching the video, the next step was questioning. The lecturer stimulated the students' thinking by asking several questions related to the picture such as the main product, the function of the product, the ingredients, the colour of the product or the advertisement, etc. Another important step was reasoning. The students were assigned to explain the reason of their answer one-by-one. In this step, the lecturer invited the students to evaluate the picture and give the best reason for their answer. In the classroom activities, some students were able to answer and give the reason very well, but some struggled and ended up by saying they know the answer but do not know the reason.

According to the research findings, students' perception of learning using multimodal text to foster critical thinking will be explained as follows:

Zahra's story

Zahra is a student with good English mastery. She showed huge interest in learning English in every meeting. Her English competence, especially in speaking, was always remarkable.

This is mainly because she took language major in her high school. Among her friends, she often communicated in English with the teacher and motivated other students to speak English in the class.

Learning English with multimodal text experiences

The first time Zahra received picture of advertisement from *WhatsApp* group, she expressed it with excitement and curiosity. She was excited to look at the giant picture of the product with bright colour and bold title. At the same time, she was also curious about what to do next with the picture. Zahra also enjoyed watching the video i.e., soft drink and mobile phone advertisement. He told that viewing the video helped her to learn materials about advertisement.

She has been able to absorb the materials delivering through multimodal text. She followed teacher's explanation and understood the materials easily. She explained that the multimodal text presented by the teacher helped her to process the information effortlessly as it was presented with the interesting picture of the product, vivid colour, and short text. She explained:

I become so eager to learn English, especially in speaking using multimodal text (advertisement and video). It is interesting to learn with the media apart from listening to the teacher's lecture. Seeing pictures and video benefit me to process the information easily as there are good picture, colourful, bold words, and short caption. The information we need is stated in the picture without we read lengthy sentences (A. Zahra, Personal communication, December 20, 2022).

Learning multimodal text to foster critical thinking skills

The next question submitted to Zahra was her experience to analyse the picture and video with the help of the teacher. She spontaneously said, "*it is mostly difficult*". After viewing the advertisement picture and video, Zahra mentioned that the learning became challenging as the teacher gave proposed several questions starting from easy to difficult one. She also stated that analysing picture can be sometimes easy and difficult depending on the familiarity of the picture. When she got background knowledge of the picture, she could connect it to answer the questions.

Although she found mostly part of analysing the pictures difficult, she expressed that she learned something new through the learning process. She said that picture and video analysis built her high order thinking skills, which is critical thinking. She learned to think well-structured and critically as she closely paid attention to details of the picture and video. She explained that:

Sometimes, I find easy to answer the questions but sometimes it is also difficult for me. When I am familiar with the picture of the product such as how to use it, what is the function, where I can find it mostly, it is easy for me. However, when I completely do not know the product, I struggled a lot. On the other hand, this is something that helped me to have well-structured and critical thinking. I also learned to look at the pictures in detail (A. Zahra, Personal communication, December 20, 2022).

Apart from her experience in analysing the multimodal text, Zahra was also given the questions related to benefit of learning multimodal for her critical thinking. She mentioned that the materials and analysis eased her to think critically outside the classroom. This also built her awareness on the hidden message of the advertisement. With the example of question given by the teacher in the classroom, she said that she could also apply them to understand the information carefully. Here are the excerpts:

There are a lot to learn after learning with multimodal text for critical thinking. In the future, I think I can be easy to think critically when I see pictures in the street or social media. I can learn to think what the meaning of the advertisement is and what is the message that will be delivered. I can also use the instructions given by the teacher to construct meaning for another picture. Lastly, maybe I can catch the information easily as I pay more attention to the details of the picture such as promo of the product, the date that promo lasts, the discount that I get, etc. (A. Zahra, Personal communication, December 20, 2022).

Apta's story

Apta is always keen on learning English. She showed positive attitude to learn English. She always wanted to try her best in speaking. Although she was not confident to speak in front of the class at the first time, mostly bringing her notes while she was speaking, she showed good improvement in speaking class. Day by day, Apta proved that she could perform better in English by practicing it a lot at home. She tried to be actively involved in any activities related to speaking English in the classroom.

Learning English with multimodal text experiences

When the teacher introduced the topic with the multimodal text, she listened to the teacher's instructions. She was very enthusiastic to have materials taught using e-pictures. Firstly, she said the object in the picture attracted her attention to closely look at it. The colourful pictures with the bold and big headings were also the things that made the picture attractive. She also enjoyed the video, although she found difficulty to analyse the video as it was moving fast.

As analysing the picture and video was the activity before going to the main teaching, she expressed that watching the video and viewing pictures helped her to build an insight to the main topic of the speaking class. After all, she could follow the teacher's instruction and explanation easily. She explained:

I am happy to learn English with pictures and video (multimodal text). I am able to understand the materials. The colourful picture is also exciting rather than monochrome. The learning in the class is also fun with the discussion about pictures and videos, but I find difficult to analyse the video. I enjoy watching video until I forget the message on the video. Sometimes, the video is also too fast to follow (G. Apta, personal communication, December 22, 2022).

Learning multimodal text to foster critical thinking skills

The following question was about the multimodal text to foster critical thinking skill. This is mainly related to the analysis activity of picture and video. She answered that analysing pictures is easy and difficult at the same time. When the information can be found directly in the picture, she found it easy. On the other hand, when the questions asked about something implicitly from the media, she thought it was hard to answer, just kept silent in the class, and waited for others to answer.

On the contrary, her experience in analysing video shows different response. She explained that viewing and evaluating video were difficult for her. She struggled to answer analysis questions due to the fast movement of the video. She needed to play video more than once to get the message of the video. Here are the excerpts:

The questions given by the teacher are easy yet difficult. Like this, I say it is easy when the answer to question can be found explicitly from the picture. I can just go directly to the picture and find the answer there. On the other hand, when the questions get more complicated or implicit, I struggled a lot. The

questions are usually started with the word questions like "why and how". This type of questions always makes me confused because I cannot find the answer in the text, and I need to think the reason why this or that happened (G. Apta, Personal communication, December 22, 2022).

Moreover, Apta was also asked whether multimodal text gives the benefits for her or not. She explained that she got many advantages from this learning using multimodal text. First, she said that multimodal text helped her to build background knowledge before learning the topic. Second, the learning speaking was exciting, understandable, not monotonous. Lastly, the learning activity, especially analysis activity, helped her to think more critically. She described that:

I got so many advantages by learning multimodal text. It gives me the idea on what should be discussed and follow the materials easily. Another benefit is it motivates me to learn English because it is interesting, easy to understand, and not boring. I also learn to evaluate the pictures more carefully, by looking at something in more details so later I can think critically about the picture I see, the video I watch, and the news I hear. I hope all the lecturers will have this activity in the future (G. Apta, Personal communication, December 22, 2022).

Students' perception towards multimodal text

The findings about the story of Zahra and Apta show that both have similar positive attitude towards multimodal text. It indicates that teaching using multimodal text can create eagerness and enthusiasm. The feeling of excitement and curiosity was also shown in both Zahra and Apta. This is relevant with the case study on multimodality in higher education conducted by Rahmanu et al. (2020). It was revealed that there is a positive trend on the use of combination of one or two modes for learning such as image, video, and technology. They further explain that learners tend to have a desire and willingness to learn material with the help of multimodal text.

Another positive result from the study is the use of multimodal text can motivate students to learn. This is similar with the finding of more recent study, which is the integration of multimodality in EFL classroom in one of high schools in Malang influences students' positive attitudes. The use of multimodal stimulates their interest in learning, which in turn motivate students and affect their achievement. Most students are also likely to agree that multimodal text improves classroom participation and allow them to practice English more (Ilmi & Dewi, 2022).

Based on the participants' stories, it is obvious that learning with multimodal text is easily understood by the students. This is particularly due to the reason of the presence of interesting picture in the form of advertisement. The advertisement picture shown by the teacher includes several key factors in helping them to analyse it, namely the giant photo of famous product in the centre of the picture, vivid colour, and the caption around the photo of the product. This can be seen that the multimodal text used combined more than one mode to be analysed, including image and word. This is believed by Unsworth (2008) to have significant effect in understanding the picture and conveying the meaning.

Another source used was employing YouTube video. Although the video was also helpful for them to learn the materials, both of them claimed that it was difficult to answer the questions for analysis. Furthermore, they asserted that they understood the conversation taking place in the video, but they did not get the message of it. Both agreed that this is due to the fast movement of the video. This is in line with the study conducted by Atayeva (2019).

The results showed that the students found the difficulties in analysing the video. They could not examine the ideas, identify the arguments, and identify the reasons and claims. In the worst case, they could not identify what was actually going on in the video. As the result, the majority of students showed average level of critical thinking.

In addition, the oral interview also indicates that students attained benefits in related to improving their critical thinking skills. Both agreed that after they learned the multimodal text, their awareness of critical thinking has raised. The critical thinking skills can be practiced inside and outside the classroom to evaluate the picture, news, and video critically. Similarly, students who were taught using multimodal text confirmed to develop students' critical reading skills as they were able to retell, find key information, discuss the main ideas, and answer questions related to the text (Amalia et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study recognizes the fact that multimodal-based pedagogy in teaching speaking provide positive attitudes towards students. Students are likely more to be enthusiastic to learn English. The multimodality in English class also improves their motivation. This study also affirms that students attain more benefits of multimodal lesson in the ESL classroom, especially fostering their critical thinking skills. Students have become more aware of the notion of thinking critically, evaluating information ethically, and paying attention to media in details. However, the study is limited on the use of multimodal texts to foster critical thinking. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers could investigate more deeply about multimodal texts and critical thinking with similar or different method. Hopefully, other researchers can use this study as a reference by using similar resources, multimodal text, to higher or lower level of learners. In addition, future researchers can use different method or media to foster students' critical thinking. In conclusion, multimodal text in the speaking class of FLSP subject helps students to foster their critical thinking skills.

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