

## Multimodality Practices in Hearing Impairment EFL Classroom

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### Abstract

*This article provides a report of teacher's experience in using ICT-integrated multimodal texts to help heard-of-hearing learners develop or improve their literacy skills especially in mastering reading comprehension. Additionally, this study tried to investigate the impacts of the use of the materials on students' learning. The study was carried out in a special need school. The research is a case study of an English teacher and three hard-of-hearing learners. The material consists of video observation, photographs, field notes, documents, and interviews with the teacher and the students. The findings showed that multimodal texts which were built with diverse modes or semiotic resources such as color, sound, motion, written text, and gesture could ease the teacher to help the students perform better in the area of reading comprehension although she also encountered some challenges. Moreover, the students perceived the use of multimodal texts positively as it allowed them to participate more actively in the classroom activities. I believe that the result of the study can serve as a consideration for English teachers in teaching readings to hard hearing learners.*

**Keywords:** *Hard Hearing, Multimodals Texts, Reading*

### 1. Introduction

Every child has the right to get a proper education including learners with special needs. Special Education Needs refers to physical, mental, or psychological conditions that may hamper students in learning something. Lowe (2016) describes students with special educational needs as those who have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. These students have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of students at their level, or have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of generally provided educational facilities. There are a number of categories of special needs learners. One of them that becomes the focus in the study is learners who are hard-of-hearing.

Teaching English as a foreign language for hard hearing learners become a crucial global issue including in Asia. They are multilingual learners. In addition to learning their national language, they also need to learn sign languages whose structures and syntaxes are different from English. In Indonesia itself, the government established special schools for students

with special needs. The education law stated that every child with disability should be given equal right to go for an education as regular students. Special schools are specifically designed for students to cope with their disability in learning so they can learn in school just like other students do. Based on the policy, special schools in Indonesia accepts students with disabilities, such as blind students, deaf students, and so on. In Indonesia, the curriculum of special schools is similar to that of regular schools but it is adapted to suit the needs of the students with special needs. Therefore, as one of the subjects, it includes English.

However, the process of learning English for deaf or hard-of-hearing students is different from regular students. For hard-of-hearing students, it is quite challenging for them to learn English because learners with hearing impairments often indicate significant delays in syntax, phoneme production, and vocabulary (Schirmer, 1985 in Cawthon, 2001). Moreover, it's difficult for them to completely process information in the form of sounds, while regular students can process them. This gives effect to their ability because of the lack of vocabulary from the sounds they fail to fully process. Furthermore, Oyewumi (2008) cited in (Mpofu, et al., 2013) stated that deaf and hearing impaired students tend to be visual learners and this leads to a problem in an environment where much

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essential information is delivered exclusively by word of mouth as what mostly happens in Indonesian context. Therefore, the language characteristic including the structure of sentences of hard-of-hearing is usually different from regular students and it will be a challenge for the teacher to teach them English.

One of the ways to help hard-of-hearing learners improve their reading skills and comprehension is to make use of appropriate materials. Teaching materials are often the most important and observable element component in classroom instruction (Nunan, 1992). It is one of the five important components of language teaching. In addition, Richards (2003) summarized the role of materials in language teaching especially textbook. The materials serve as a resource that supports learners practice and communicative interaction, presents grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and ideas for classroom activities, and serves a support for less experienced teachers. Teachers, particularly those who are less experienced, teachers rely to all guidance provided by a textbook. However, it is a fact that a textbook does not always meet the variety of conditions in a language class (Ur, 1996 in Richards, 2003). Sometimes, it is necessary for teachers to use other teaching materials in addition to textbooks and modify them in order to be relevant to the demands and needs of particular group of learners. It implies that teachers should develop materials based on students' need. In developing the materials, teachers' experiences and understanding of their students play an important role, so that the students are motivated in learning the target language. By having objectives of the teaching and learning or being familiar with the needs of the learners, the teachers can develop their own materials for the learners to achieve the objectives or to fulfil the learners' special needs.

As mentioned previously, hard-of-hearing children tend to be visual learners. Considering this characteristic, multimodality is chosen as the approach to deliver reading materials. Moreno and Mayer (2007) states that multimodal learning environment makes use of various modes to represent content knowledge. In such multimodal courses, the instructional events or elements are presented and delivered in more than one sensory mode, therefore can facilitate the learning of students. The multimodal forms provide students with some multiple genres of texts they can explore where words, sounds, images, and other modes are put together as learning sources. The combination of printed and visual information presented from the text will allow hard-of-hearing students to make meaning easily thus improve their reading comprehension (Moreillon, 2007).

Considering the benefits of multimodality, an English teacher of one of the special needs schools in Indonesia has occasionally used multimodal materials in teaching English particularly reading. In this study we want to uncover the how the English teacher use multimodal reading materials and the students' perception towards the use of the multimodal texts. There have been some studies conducted on the use of multimodality for hard of hearing learnings but most of them are experimental studies. A study that provides a comprehensive explanation of why and how the teacher incorporated multimodality on reading activities and how the students perceive learning reading by using multimodal texts is still scant. Thus, in this study we would attempt to answer these two research questions are how do the teacher use multimodal texts in delivering reading materials for hard-of-hearing learners and what are the impacts of the use of multimodal texts towards students' learning?.

## **2. Research Method**

This is a qualitative case study. According to Yin (2014), a case study is an ideal design for understanding and examining observations of real life's educational phenomena. A descriptive case study is appropriate to study an area in education where little research has been conducted such as this thesis' research focus and it is the most appropriate choice for this study. The study was conducted in a private special school. The participants were one English teacher and three hard-of-hearing students with moderate hearing loss. The English teacher has been teaching English for hard-hearing learners for 5 years. She was interested to use multimodal materials in the form of PPT.

Therefore, the case study method was chosen to examine one teacher's approach to working with students. The study aimed to discover how this teacher used multimodality approach in her classroom. It examined what she did in her classroom to help students, how she treated students and how she dealt with them on a the learning process.

We collected the data by using variety of data collection such as in-depth interview, observation, and audiovisual materials (photograph and videos). Then, to analyze the data, we did data organization, data reduction, data description, data interpretation, and data validation.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **3.1. Result**

In this section the main results of the study are presented. The section concentrates on findings that provide insight into the two research questions

mentioned above. Those findings are about how the teacher chose ICT based multimodal texts, the problems while using the materials and its solution, and the effect of using the materials towards the teacher and students. To make all of those clear, it will be elaborated in the explanation below.

#### **a. How the Teacher Uses Multimodal Reading Materials**

This study focuses on the use of multimodality in teaching reading comprehension which are divided into three reading stages reading stages proposed by some scholars, this includes: pre-reading stage, while reading stage and post reading stage (Hood et al, 2005; Gibbon, 2002; Brown, 2001).

##### **Pre-reading Stage**

To begin with, the main reason why the teacher preferred to use multimodal materials was their attractive look thus it was very effective in boosting the mood of teaching learning activity in the classroom. To use the materials, the teacher had to do several steps. The first step was that she selected the theme in advance that later she would use it as teaching material. The materials were in the form of interactive Power Points involving pictures. In addition, the PPT was linked to other interactive websites as well.

Before using Multimodal materials in the teaching and learning process, the teacher told us that she had to prepare several tool such as LCD projector, laptop, and speaker active. The teacher stated that preparation was vital to prevent the technical problems commonly happened in the implementation of digital tools.

*“The class starts at 8 but I always came to the room 15 minutes earlier to prepare everything such as connecting my laptop to the projector, checking the audio, and so forth.”*

In this stage, one very popular kind of activities that the teacher does is brainstorming. In this activity, students are invited to call out words, knowledge and experience that relevant to the text. According to the teacher, the aim of these activities is to familiarize students with the contextual features of a text or text structure. She did that by showing pictures and asked some questions to the students.

*“I showed pictures related to the text and asked the students some questions related to the picture such as what pictures they were, who were on the pictures, etc. The aim is to predict what the text is about. I also discuss new vocabularies with students because discussing new vocabulary can help them to comprehend the text”.*

The teacher also added that when students have problems of unknown words, she can encourage them to use dictionary.

##### **While Reading Stage**

After preparing the hardware, the teacher started the teaching and learning process by firstly informing the topic being discussed, Things in My School. Then, the teacher asked the students to pay attention to the screen. With the special feature of PPT materials involving pictures and text together, the students seemed more enthusiastic and concentrate on seeing the presentation. The teacher then presented a video about the things which exist in the school, and asked the students to repeat the vocabularies being listened to. After showing the video, the teacher paused the presentation and check students' understanding about the reading text.

The teacher also assisted the students who found themselves difficult either in translating, or pronouncing the words. Surprisingly, each group's representative presented loudly and confidently. Even though there were some mistakes in pronouncing the words, it was normal since they are still in the process of learning.

*“Due to the hearing impairment of the students, they could not pronounce some words and sentence clearly. Therefore I read the text loudly so the students could do lip-reading”*

After that, the teacher again asked the students to pay attention on the materials presentation. This time, the teacher reviewed the material being studied on that day. The teacher presented number of vocabulary of things in the school. Then, the teacher together with the students tried to pronounce each vocabulary being presented correctly. According to the teacher, this phase was crucial in familiarizing the students with the correct pronunciation.

*“These students must have exposure, and a time to get familiar and to have a general idea of the vocabulary meaning. Therefore I often give them additional activities related to vocabulary mastery”*

##### **Post Reading Stage**

In this stage, the teachers had done the activities which include: questioning, clarifying and justifying comprehension, asking for specific questions, reviewing and follow-up strategy. The teacher said that that the purpose of asking questions was to check the students' comprehension. Besides, she also asked how the students felt about using the ICT in learning English whether they were happy or not and whether it was helpful or not.

At the end of the teaching and learning process, the teacher thanked the students for being active and cooperative. Besides, the teacher said that all of the students did a great job on that day. The teacher also informed the students that on the following meetings, the teacher will use a more interesting multimodal materials presentation.

### **b. The Impacts of Using Multimodal Texts for HH Students**

While focusing on observing how PPT materials has been used in the classroom, it is also important to learn the students' perception towards the use of this advance presentation software. In this study, the majority of the students stated that PPT materials made the material being presented more practical and understandable.

By implementing multimodal materials in the teaching and learning process, the students gained multiple benefits. They stated that multimodal materials stimulated their creativity and imagination. They also informed that the materials could strengthen their memory in learning vocabulary. As we know there is a great number of English vocabulary, and it is extremely difficult to recall by hard hearing students. Therefore, the use of PPT materials can help the students to remember at least some common, useful, and important words to know.

#### **1) Engagemet**

Related to multimodal materials' lay-out, the teacher loved the PPT materials since they were colorful. In using the, there were also some effects towards the students. She told that by using multimodal materials, the students became more enthusiastic to study. Since English subject was considered arduous by the students, it was needed to make the teaching learning activity as interesting as possible. By using this materials, the students were facilitated to learn more interestingly.

*"I could see that my students enjoyed the activities. They laughed so often during the activities. They also became more engaged. Although they still found some difficulties, they were eager to ask."*

The way how the teacher used multimodal materials in the classroom is also one of the objects being studied in this research. We comprehensively observed how multimodal materials was incorporated into language teaching and learning process. Based on the observation, all of the students look happy when reading the texts from the screen. They smiled and laughed frequently especially when animated pictures were presented. The students said that they felt happy during the lesson and the hoped that the next English lessons would be delivered using multimedia materials as well.

After all, the findings of this study informed that the majority of the students agreed if their teacher used PPT materials continually for the better result of teaching and learning process. They stated that

multimodal materials eased them to learn vocabulary, increased their motivation, and made vocabulary learning more enjoyable.

#### **2) Comprehension**

As a result of the new information technologies and computer- mediated communications, contemporary communication has become highly multimodal moving, particularly, towards the extensive use of the image, while meaning is inevitably derived from ways that are multimodal. The materials consist of visual elements, which in combination with language hold a prominent role in conveying the essential information. This results in increased comprehension as stated by the teacher.

*"I always ask questions in the end of the lesson and they showed good comprehension."*

#### **3) Motivation**

The other effect of multimodality is the increasing students 'motivation in the EFL classroom. One of the students said that she preferred learning using videos and pictures presented from the LCD. Besides, based on the observation, the three students often smiled and laughed when looking at the animation presented from the power points. Even, one of the students requested the teacher to use the similar material for the next meetings.

#### **4) Vocabulary Mastery**

Mastering vocabulary is the key to learn English well. English vocabulary teaching is an indispensable part of the whole English teaching. Language teachers have been placing great emphasis to teach English vocabulary. However, the results of mastering vocabulary is not desirable, because words remembered by the way of rote can be forgotten very easily and won't last long. Therefore, it is of great necessity to adopt a new way to promote English vocabulary teaching. The finding shows that the application of Multimodal foreign language teaching facilitated English vocabulary teaching. It is argued by the teacher.

*"They improved their vocabulary mastery. Probably because they still remembered the picture."*

The observation also showed the same result. When the teacher reviewed the vocabulary learned in the previous meeting "What is this?" The students still remember the English word for it.

### **3.2 Discussion**

The finding of the research indicates that the reason why the English teacher has endeavored to use multimodal materials is their practicality and attractive look. Interactive PPT presentation has with visually-oriented design is one of the innovative options to

capture students' interest in learning English (Strasser, 2014).

Besides, using ICT-integrated multimodal materials, the teacher can be more creative in designing learning activity. In this research, the teacher combined materials with group work activity. In the initial phase, the teacher played the PPT. Meaningfully, this phase makes the students observe the vocabulary by themselves. They could watch and listen to the correct pronunciation, and they could see the picture of the things being learned as well. After watching the video, the students were asked to work together to discuss the vocabulary in the school with the specific category. Finally, when they had to communicate the result of their discussion, they could present well with good pronunciation and high self-confidence. After communicating the result, the students were provided with number of vocabularies presented in the materials, and with the teacher's assistance, they practiced to pronounce each vocabulary correctly. Based on the finding, it is an evident that the use of PPT in teaching vocabulary could improve students' vocabulary, and it seems that materials is a valuable tool for enhancing vocabulary learning (Aljehani, 2015). Eventually, using modern technology like the materials eases teachers in engaging students in learning (Masri et al. 2015).

In order to help the hard hearing students to easily understand the materials, the teacher used gesture and demonstration and read the text loudly to her students. It is in line with Dotter (2008) who said that hard hearing students like to see also the mouthing of a foreign language or to hear what they are able to hear of it.

Moreover, the teacher needed to give more time to students to comprehend the materials. According to Dotter (2008), as hearing impaired people cannot utilize the visual and the auditory channel simultaneously, but have to use the visual one more or less exclusively, education becomes more time-consuming than for hearing people. If something is presented visually, one then needs enough time afterwards to use an external memory system like writing or typing or signing.

In addition, the students also showed positive attitude towards the materials in reading and learning vocabulary. They stated that the materials made the material being learned more practical and understandable. Moreover, they argued that materials could stimulate their creativity and imagination. More importantly, materials facilitated them to understand the text better and to learn vocabulary in an enjoyable and fruitful atmosphere. A positive attitude shown by the students will never be achieved if the teacher has

no any positive attitude too towards the use of such a digital tool like the PPT materials. In this research, it is clearly uncovered that the teacher is passionate in incorporating technology into teaching and learning process. Undoubtedly, when teachers have a positive attitude towards technology, a more effective result of language learning will be more easily achieved (Alberth, 2013).

#### 4. Conclusion

This case study recognizes the fact that multimodality promotes hard-of-hearing students' engagement in the teaching and learning of ESL by enhancing their meaning-making abilities with the supplement of ICT as a tool. This study affirms that students' get many benefits of multimodal lessons in an ESL classroom. They become highly engaging and motivated. They could also understand the text better. However in doing most of the activities, they still need a guidance for the teacher. In conclusion, this case study promotes teaching and learning experiences that are multimodal in nature to acquire literacy skills necessary for students with hearing impairment without being restricted to one mode of design.

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