
**SECONDARY STUDENTS' REFLECTION TOWARDS MULTIMODAL
READING TASKS THROUGH VIRTUAL DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORM
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: VOICES FROM INDONESIA**

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Abstract

This study reports on secondary students' reflection towards multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning. It investigates students' learning outcomes after studying a multimodal reading involving five-step learning activities, including lesson preparation, the use of supplementary materials, the meaningfulness of activities, scaffolding/modeling, comprehensible input on teacher modeling the reading activity, practice and application and review and assessment, and feedback. The research was conducted in the Senior High School in Indonesia in which thirty five students (20 females and 15 males) participated in this study. The data were analyzed by using Braun & Clark's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings show that there are benefits from this digital platform learning such as the availability of myriad sources online which the students could access at their flexible and convenience time. Additionally, Student teachers' autonomy, agency, engagement, confidence, skill-set, and the ability to collaborate through online discussion are the important point that they experienced during their learning. Finally, the short time of the study included in the exploration might also indicate the strong need for further longitudinal research on the topic.

INTRODUCTION

Globally the pandemic of COVID-19 caused by the novel virus SARS-CoV-2 has changed spectacularly in social interaction and organization, and the education sector such universities and initial teacher education (ITE) learning system has not been excepted. Across the world the educational institutions have changed their platform learning from face-to-face classes to virtual digital classroom learning in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. To prevent learning loss during the period of this social distancing, educational leaders should adapt a new educational framework i.e., virtual digital platform learning that might contribute to learning continuity for the students during periods of disruption caused by coronavirus (COVID-19). Digital learning dealing with learning facilitated and supported by digital technologies is realized as a vital part of formal education, and countries around the world have integrated the use of digital technologies into their national curricula (Harju, Koskinen & Pehkonen (2019).

As Chen, Zou, Cheng, & Xie (2020) state that “technologies have been widely applied to the teaching and learning of various disciplines, including language education, and the quantity, quality, and diversity of the technologies that have been integrated into language learning are significant” (p.1). Teacher educators currently have a choice of diverse technological tools to store, manage, and present information and support various multi-modal and nonlinear teaching approaches.

Technologically, digital learning can be defined as web-based learning which effectively makes use of the information technology to impart knowledge to the students. At the time of writing, the resources of digital learning include (1) simulation : this resource aids teacher's explanation, and allows learners to test out their ideas and experiment, (2) animation: this can demonstrate processes which are difficult to describe or show in two dimensions, (3) quiz: this allow learners to test their own understanding and gain feedback promptly,(4) electronic textbook: All learners can access a copy of the relevant resources, and (5) learning object: this resource has been designed to meet specified learning outcomes and can be incorporated into and reused in a range of learning materials.

Beauchamp (2015) asserts that learning to reflect is a key component of teacher preparation at university level, both for theoretical and practical course components. Without the key ability to reflect on practice, pre-service teachers may not be able to overcome the potentially harmful effects of inappropriate views of education formed during their history of learning (Miller & Shiet, 2016). Many studies have documented the benefits of incorporating reflective journals into foreign language education at university level, however investigating how student teachers' reflection towards multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform remains scantily examined. This study reports on student teachers' reflection towards multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning. The implementation of this instructional digital learning in the initial teacher education context (ITE) remains under-explored. To fill this gap, this brief reports findings drawing on an virtual digital learning project on the multimodal reading tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic. A research question guide this study: What is student teachers' reflection toward multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the literature, previous studies have confirmed some result of teaching and learning activities from face to face interaction changed into online classroom during the spreading of COVID-19 pandemic all around the world. As reported by Moorhouse (2020) the adaptations from face to face instruction to online classroom are made due to the suspension of face to face classes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at a Hong Kong university. It describes the

adaptations the tutor made, and the challenges faced adapting to the new mode of delivery. The online content includes the dissemination and storage of readings and session materials on a learning management system (LMS) and the use of an instant messaging platform (IMP) to facilitate out of class communication (Moorhouse, 2020). He added that a combination of asynchronous and synchronous modes of instruction was adopted during the online class. The asynchronous online instruction involves the dissemination and storage of readings and session materials on the LMS with the addition of annotated PowerPoints, with the tutor providing voice-over narration. Meanwhile, the synchronous online teaching involves one-hour long real-time live lessons delivered through video conferencing software (VCS).

Nguyen (2020) explored the readiness to use ICT in collaborative writing held by teachers and students in a university EFL learning context in Vietnam. Collaborative writing in this study means students collaborate to do the writing tasks in groups as required by their teachers. The objective of this study can also be understood as the investigation of whether teachers were ready to conduct ICT supported collaborative writing among their students and whether students were ready to use ICT for collaborative writing with other students.

Another case about online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic comes from Philippine. Talidong & Toquero (2020) revealed that teachers practice virtual learning, communicate with the professional community, adhere to quarantine requirements, and find purposeful activities to deal with anxiety due to the suspension of national school-related activities in the country brought by the pandemic. In case of an extension of the suspension of face-to-face education on the school year 2020–2021 due to the pandemic, the Department of Education launched the DEPED Commons Project to serve as an online platform for virtual lessons that teachers and even students nationwide can use as an alternative, but this is still on its trial stage and is not compulsory. Likewise, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) also suspended the classes on the same month, but advised to deploy available distance learning and alternative modes, but which is not yet realized as of this moment since virtual learning is still new to the educational system in the Philippines. Talidong & Toquero (2020) focus on an online survey about the experiences, attitudes, and practices of the teachers to deal with anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Waluyo (2020) conducted teaching and learning general English using ICT integrating concepts of smart classroom and active learning into course design in Walailak University, Thailand. The general English courses adopted theme-based learning with integrated-skills approach, as instructed in the curriculum, which was used as the foundation during the course design process. The focus is on the concepts of ICT integration into language teaching to facilitate synchronous and asynchronous learning, extend teacher-student interactions in and outside classroom, develop autonomous learning, and improve learning outcomes and achievement. Among the activities, for instance, are think-pair-share and thinking aloud pair problem-solving, which make students work individually and in pair, then share their responses in class.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research questions guide this study was ‘what are secondary students’ reflection toward multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning?’ To address this question, The present study was informed by participatory qualitative methodology (Kral, 2014). The research question reveals a qualitative inquiry since the study examined non-hypothetical question and naturally occurring phenomena as well as attempted to understand multiple constructions of meanings and knowledge situated in a senior high school context (Stake, 2010). With this argument in mind, qualitative research was adopted since it informs individual understandings, meanings, and experience (Kingley, Philips, Townsend, & Henderson-Wilson, 2010). Additionally, the qualitative approach was used to guide us to examine secondary

students' reflection multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning situated in the online classroom. For analyzing the data, the researcher will perform thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The online classroom is defined as a micro sociocultural reality of students and teachers as members of online classroom community of practice in the educational landscape. A case study design (Yin, 2018) was adopted to capture such a micro social reality showing lived experiences of the student teachers who experimented with multimodal reading tasks. The participatory approach was selected to promote student teachers' engagement and capacity building in the online classroom community through participants' sharing of experience and expertise. Epistemologically, the present study was grounded in interpretative and critical traditions inasmuch as central to the study was student teachers' reflection toward multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning.

In this study, the author use the term 'digital learning' to refer to students using digital technology as a part of instruction in a formal educational context. Students used personal laptops or other types of personal computing devices for studying and learning i.e., smart phone. In this project, thirty-five students participated. The participants were second grade students of Senior High School in Indonesia. They were 15 males and 20 females. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 16 years old. The course introduced text types, meaning, grammar, expression and assessment embedded in the current mandated curriculum context. The authors collaboratively designed multimodal reading tasks including the dissemination and storage of readings and session materials on a learning management system (LMS) i.e., Edmodo website and the use of an instant messaging platform (IMP) to facilitate out of class communication using WhatsApp.

This study was conducted for five months from January until May 2020. For ethical purpose, pseudonyms are used in this article. Before the study commenced, the authors convened a meeting with the thirty-five students as participants detailing an informed consent form, and distributed informed consent form sheets. The authors asked them to read through and sign off the form to ensure that all of the data would be kept confidential and be used for publication purposes. They agreed to sign the consent form as a legal document of their participation in the study. They also deserved the right to withdraw from the study.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Based on selective students' reflection data analysis, two finding themes were identified, such as (1) Students' experiences of the benefits and challenges of a digital learning, and (2) Students' autonomy in their digital learning process. These themes reflect to the question under study stated earlier.

Students' experiences of the benefits and challenges of a digital learning

All participants expressed in their reflections that learning reading digital texts was a useful task as it allowed them the time for studying the topics anytime and anywhere this helped minimize feelings of anxiety. They also considered it a fun and creative exercise, very different to face-to-face classroom. Regarding students' experiences, they had both positive and negative experiences, while learning reading digital texts on their computer tools or smart phones. The students reported that they had positive experience learning reading through virtual learning. Most of students enjoyed their online learning process. For example, Putra (pseudonym) said:

*I could **understand deeply** the materials since **learning through WhatsApp**. It was **simple** and **easy than Edmodo** website. We could discuss every materials learned by casual chatting and put much attention on the important discussions. I had learned a lot from online discussion. I could see how my classmates organized their graphic organizers. For me, working on graphic*

organizers was something new. I never did it before. We regularly posted our quiz answer and graphic organizers and invited our classmates to provide feedback on the topic discussed.

Further UMI (pseudonym) wrote

Learning reading through virtual made my learning activities fun and interesting. Through online discussion I could post and comment my opinion freely toward the materials learned. I could repeat and learn the materials as I wanted. This learning process helped me built my confidence of learning reading that I felt uneasy in the face-to-face classroom. This learning process made me realize the potential of social media for language learning. I was very happy the way my teacher encouraged me and my friends to contribute to online discussion. The source materials are available there; I didn't have to look anywhere else so I could save time. There were articles, PowerPoint slides, and videos. Those were very helpful.

The two students' reflections indicate that learning reading through virtual learning were positive for them because this platform allowed them to post, comment on, share, and discuss the topics learned. Students' voices here reveal that flexibility, agency, engagement, confidence, skill-set, and the ability to collaborate through online discussion are the important point that the students experienced during their learning reading digital texts. In this platform they could read the source materials at their own time. They read through the materials to have a good understanding of the topics learned so that they felt more confident to participate in the online classroom. These benefits are also articulated in previous studies by e.g., Aslan & Zhu, 2016; Hinostroza, 2018; Kilinc et al., 2018; Lawrence & Tar, 2018 that similarly focused on the perceived usefulness of integrating ICT in teaching and learning process. The availability of myriad sources online which the students could access at their flexible and convenience time was reflected by the students to be helpful in their effort to understand a topic. This statement is in line with Al-Dosari's (2011) finding that online course users considered accessibility to be the greatest advantage of online learning.

Even though the participants felt that learning reading digitally was useful and attractive, they also described factors that made difficult and inconvenient. One of these involved frequent disturbances. Due to unstable internet connection, there was difficult to access the learning materials and students were difficult to join the online discussion. Nani (pseudonym) said, "To me the frequent constraints in the learning teaching activity process are the problem of unstable internet connection. Especially when the weather in the area is slightly dark, it will certainly affect the good quality of a signal in the area and cause uncertainty to access the learning materials". Regarding this, Lawrence and Tar (2018) reported that teachers in using technology are frustrated when the Internet is slow and inaccessible; when clicking on a link, it needs a very long time to open it and when the page is open, it is not useful anymore. She added "I think the quality of learning process become ineffective because sometimes there is a distance between students and lecturer that make a passive learning. I got a boring time when I should learn online all day. I cannot face to face meet my friends and my lecturer as usual in the classroom. Yeti (pseudonym) added that "online class sometimes is not effective because during the discussion I cannot share my difficulties toward the material of grammatical features of the text type due to the limited time and overlap comments from my classmate. And I can't stop loving face-to-face classroom. Personally, I miss the time to learn face to face in the classroom and I hope we can be back to normal situation soon."

Students' autonomy in their digital learning process

All participants agreed that learning multimodal reading through virtual digital platform required time and effort. But self-directed task had encouraged them to be independent learners or autonomous learners. Hu & Du, 2013 assert that learner autonomy or a self-directed studying ability refers to learners in a learning activity having acquired subject consciousness and self-awareness which later constantly.

Nevertheless one-third of them were frustrated by tools issues while trying to download and upload and share the tasks for submission. Most of them said that they faced the difficulty in accessing the online class by using mobile phone not by using personal computer (PC). Additionally, the facilities of Internet access were poor regarding both speed and stability. This suggests that access to computers and the Internet is limited and uneven in Indonesia (Wahid, Furuholdt, & Kristiansen, 2004). In other words, the diverse backgrounds students come from should not be taken for granted, and it should not be assumed that all university students have Internet access.

Sam (pseudonym) wrote that the internet was helpful in enriching his knowledge on related subjects. He could find a lot of references and materials that were useful for his learning tasks. With the use of the Internet, he no longer only relied on books and handouts since he could search other sources from the Internet. He added that:

"I focused on a self-led learning environment. The lack of dependence on face-to-face communication allowed me to think in abstract ways and make me push myself to work hard and innovate in order to understand the information the lecturer provided in online course. The scope of learning was totally depended on my self-discipline and initiative and that could be a great development experience for my individual learning.

Farouk (pseudonym) told that Fortunately, my lecturer uploaded a voice recorder to help us understand some theories of text type. It made me understand better about the grammatical features of procedure text and context of the text."

Schunk and Zimmerman (1998) contend that when students become more efficient at self-regulating their learning over time, these actions appear to be an expression of autonomy. The change in students' autonomous learning could be particularly affected by the availability of the content and access to the learning activities in the Edmodo website. In other words, control over their learning resources reflects to the basis of students' autonomy not only attempting to do it but also actually managing it successfully. However, student attitudes to learning autonomously vary in terms of their cultural background, as well as according to the personality of the individual. The stage of learner autonomy of any student will always be at a certain point along a continuum. By asking learners to explore the resources available to them in the Edmodo website, as well as encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning, the authors set the students on the path to full independence. With this in mind, students probably could not stop learning and start the activities without the teacher's teaching, and asking questions for clarification when in doubt. As a result, the authors confirm that learning reading through virtual

classroom had a great influence on learners' autonomy compared to the face-to-face classroom pedagogy.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study aimed to explore the student teachers' reflection towards multimodal reading tasks through virtual digital platform learning. The context of our study was higher education, particularly English pre-service teachers' education program during the pandemic of COVID-19, but the findings might be viewed in the general context of digital-driven learning. All the students went through five-step learning activities, such as lesson preparation to examine the lesson-planning process, including the use of supplementary materials, and the meaningfulness of activities, scaffolding/modeling to focus on making explicit and direct links between past learning related to the students' schemata and new concepts, comprehensible input to consider adjusting teacher modeling multimodal reading to enhance comprehension, practice and application and review and assessment to assess students' learning, and provided feedback to students on their output. The findings show that encountered some benefits from this digital platform learning such as the availability of myriad sources online which the students could access at their flexible and convenience time. Additionally, Student teachers' autonomy, agency, engagement, confidence, skill-set, and the ability to collaborate through online discussion are the important point that they experienced during their learning reading digital texts. Finally, the short time of the studies included in exploration might also indicate the strong need for further longitudinal research on the topic.

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