
Promoting a Multidimensional Literacy Framework through Texts and Tasks for EFL Reading Class

Luluk Iswati

Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta
luluk007@umy.ac.id

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Email Correspondence: luluk007@umy.ac.id

Abstract

Generally, the teaching of reading for English as a foreign language (EFL) learner is only focused on developing learners' English language competence. Little had been done to stimulate learners to develop a multidimensional literacy (Kucer, 2014) that consists of four stages: linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental. The teaching of reading should be aimed beyond the classroom context. It should not only evoke learners' linguistic and cognitive ability, but should also elicit them to go further into sociocultural and developmental aspects. Thus, this study is aimed at proposing a multidimensional framework of literacy through texts and tasks so that they will be beneficial for learners' actual use of literacy in their everyday life. This paper proposes a modified model of Kucer's multidimensional literacy which is combined with principles in reading texts selection and reading tasks. The framework suggests that the degree of text difficulty and unfamiliarity should be gradually increased as well as the level of tasks challenge and variety.

Keywords: multidimensional literacy, texts, tasks, EFL reading

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been agreed that reading is a very important academic skill in learning a foreign language (Anderson, 2003). Teaching reading to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes should be intended not only to increase students' reading fluency, but also to engage them in experiencing multidimensional aspects such as linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental (Kucer, 2014). Those four dimensions of literacy is pivotal because each act of real-world use of literacy includes these four dimensions in a very real way (Kucer, 2014). When learners are encouraged to experience multidimensional literacy, they will gain benefit when applying their literacy skills in their daily life. Being literate should not only be perceived with ability to read and understand a text, but also ability to activate cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental literacy. Contrastingly, in a lot of reading classes the teaching of reading mainly

concerns on developing students' linguistic competence, thus gives little or no attempts to develop students' cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental competence. Students, especially in EFL context, still demonstrate a lack of critical awareness to challenge social injustice (Liu, 2017), therefore the teaching of reading needs to go beyond activating students' linguistic and cognitive competence merely. Ciardiello (2000) urges that becoming literate means undergoing the process of developing communicative competence, knowledge and awareness, as well as establishing relationships in a community. Therefore, the teaching of reading in EFL settings should also promote students' cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental competence through the right selection of reading materials and activities.

Indeed, teaching EFL reading can be a demanding task especially when students are beginning learners. In fact, many studies in EFL contexts have exhibited students' difficulties in reading comprehension (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018; Jafarigohar & Khanjani, 2014; Qarqez & Rashid, 2017). Difficulties in comprehending reading texts among students have driven a lot of studies related to reading strategies (Amirian, 2013; Dabaghi & Akvan, 2014; Moghadam, 2008), while at the same time neglected the area of stimulating students' cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental aspects. In fact, to date those three areas of multidimensional literacy are still under researched. The importance of promoting multidimensional literacy implies that reading texts and activities should not be solely seen as written linguistic forms and meaning. Texts should enable students to activate their thinking, to generate their awareness about their role and identity in social relationship, and also to make them develop their process of becoming (Kucer, 2015).

Jafarigohar & Khanjani (2014) state that reading comprehension is a key skill in EFL educational settings. Reading issues in EFL contexts can be complex, especially when this receptive skill is taught among learners of low English proficiency. Learners must possess adequate vocabulary mastery in order to comprehend the content of a text (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018). Otherwise, they will fail to gain comprehension about the given texts. Similarly, Qarqez & Rashid (2017) urge that readers must be able to interpret what the writer of a text means in order to understand its content. Habók et al. (2019) urge that reading comprehension in EFL

context is usually done by employing strategies, and learners with high proficiency of English have less difficulties in applying the strategies

Some strategies employed by EFL learners in order to gain reading comprehension are using background knowledge, illustrations, and planning (looking at the title, heading, and picture of the text) (Jafarigohar & Khanjani, 2014). Furthermore, Habók et al. (2019) state that proficiency in EFL reading directly influences students' attitude in English, and both proficiency and attitude affect students' strategy in reading. This is to say that in EFL context, language proficiency, attitude, and strategy are important aspects for successful reading. Jetton & Alexander (2001) maintain that strategies are naturally consciously employed, procedural, substantial, and beneficial.

Reading in EFL contexts can be more challenging especially when readers lack exposure of EFL reading materials. Qarqez & Rashid (2017) found that EFL learners encounter some reading difficulties such as being unfamiliar with foreign and ambiguous words, lack time for understanding the content. The more difficult a text is, the more time is needed by EFL readers (Jafarigohar & Khanjani, 2014). In addition to difficulty due to minimum exposure to EFL texts, generating learners' critical awareness should be taken into account. The challenge of teaching becomes more complex since EFL readers still lack critical awareness about social injustice and demonstrate low responsibility for their role as a global citizen (Liu, 2017).

The multi dimensions of literacy

Kucer (2014) describes that literacy in the process of reading and writing consists of four elements: linguistic and other sign systems, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental. *Linguistic* element focuses on text, through which individuals show their ability to break codes and make meanings. The function of communication is to address meaning through multimodal system. In this stage learners' main concern is on how they deal with linguistic issues in reading texts. The second element, *cognitive*, highlights the role of mind to make meaning. In this stage, meaning is created by making use strategies and mental process. This is where literacy goes beyond linguistic level and starts to activate learners' thinking skill. Thus, the role of texts is to evoke learners critical thinking. In the third aspect, *sociocultural*, each individual uses and criticizes texts through social identities. It is where communities use multiliteracy to negotiate with others by showing their perspectives. In this stage, literacy functions to help learners' critical awareness about social issues. This is where literacy is applicable to construct a social role. The last phase, which is

developmental, refers to the growth of individuals in their literacy process. By developing through the three previously mentioned elements, each individual is in the process of becoming, not literate. In other words, undergoing the multidimensional aspects of literacy leads individuals to become what or who they are, not merely being literate. After arriving at the developmental stage, they go beyond being literate.

Reading texts selection

Teaching reading should consider text selection as generating learners' interest to read is essential. Nation (2008) asserts that enjoyment in reading is important, so giving help to push learners' reading fluency should be done. Thus, in selecting the texts, the materials and language aspects should be familiar to learners. Moreover, the level of difficulty of selected texts should comply with students' level of language proficiency (Huang, 2013). When texts from existing publishers are used, teachers must ensure that the texts is challenging for students' thinking and make meanings for them (Lewis & Dahbany, 2008). Concurrent with this, Caccamise, Franzke, Eckhoff, & Kintsch (2017) argue that although easy texts make learners comprehend the content more easily, it is important to give them complex texts so as to challenge their thinking skill. Similarly, Ellis (2008) in Jafarigohar & Khanjani (2014) asserts that giving challenging texts and tasks to learners will stimulate learners' zone of proximal development. In short, texts that are selected for EFL learners not only easy texts, but also those that can stimulate learners in the higher order thinking.

Reading tasks

When dealing with EFL reading tasks, learners will prefer to use native language, choose more interesting activities, and select their preferred topics (Grant et al., 2007). Nation (2008) maintains that easier tasks can be given as beginning tasks. Then, to train reading fluency, learners should be encouraged to practice scanning, skimming, paired reading, and speed reading. Meanwhile, in order to promote cognition, some tasks can be developed: critical literacy, developing good questions, and creating concept maps (Lewis & Dahbany, 2008). Reading tasks can also require learners to write in their perspective by responding to a text and a given visual (Porto, 2013).

Review of previous studies

Some studies on multidimensional reading literacy have been conducted. Fuchs et al. (2017) conducted a study with two purposes: to investigate the efficacy of a multidimensional reading comprehension tutoring program and to find out how the varied program affects the working memory. The study

employed an experimental method which lasted for 14 weeks and involved 50 teachers, 15 tutors, and 120 children of grades 3 and 5 from 13 schools. In random, students were assigned to join 2 tutoring groups and a control group. The study revealed that the 2 tutored groups outperformed the control group on near-transfer measure, but not on far-transfer measure. Although Fuchs et al.,(2017) demonstrated a multidimensional approach of reading comprehension, it seems that the multidimensional aspects tested in the study only covered two aspects – linguistic and cognitive. Other dimensions such as sociocultural and developmental were not touched.

Other study was undertaken by Hudson et al. (2009) who developed a conceptual model of reading fluency based on multidimensional concepts. The model encompassed three elements – elements of reading comprehension, elements of reading fluency, and elements of decoding fluency. The proposed conceptual framework implies that speed and accuracy in reading are resulted from multifaceted processes that are efficiently undergone in a short time span. The study suggests that fluency and automaticity in each layer must be developed in order to be a proficient reader. Hudson et al., (2009) have demonstrated a convincing and comprehensive multidimensional framework of reading fluency which has implications on instruction and assessment. However, what Hudson et.al failed to address was the context in which the framework is to be implemented. In fact, it was not clearly discussed to what level of learners was the proposed model would be implemented.

Alyousef & Alsharif (2017) investigated the literacy and numeracy practice of six accounting students using multidimensional approach. The epistemologies of the accounting module and how students used the module to complete the given assignments were explored and described. Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis was also done in order to discover the experiential meanings from accounting texts. The results of exploring the curriculum of the module showed that there is a consistency between the textbook's content and the learning outcomes. In addition, the findings showed that ability in writing reports, memos, e-mails and faxes must be possessed by the participants so that they can develop communicate effectively. Alyousef & Alsharif (2017)demonstrated how multiliteracies (literacy and numeracy practice) are applied and actually needed for students' future career. It ensures the need to teach multiliteracy in the classroom setting, so that learners' mastery in multiliteracy can support their careers. Although Alyousef & Alsharif's study has shown the importance of multiliteracy, it still not involves other areas of multidimensional literacies. The study mainly concerns the area of linguistic and cognitive dimensions.

Recent study was carried out by Liew et al. (2020) which was aimed at addressing pathways to reading competence using multidimensional and contextual-developmental view to point out the role of

self-regulated emotion, contexts of literacy, and learning process. The study was driven by the fact that reading comprehension can be a frustrating activity especially among beginning readers. Thus, emotion and motivation are critical to be regulated for the success of reading. Liew et al.(2020) also included children neurobiological and behavioral assets as the factors that can contribute to reading competence. Theoretically, the conceptual framework in Liew et al. (2020) represents multi aspects that can determine reading competence, yet measuring and observing emotion might be difficult to do since this aspect is not tangible.

The limitations of the previous studies on multidimensional literacy urged the importance of designing a framework to promote the teaching of EFL reading by multidimensional approach through texts and tasks. Due to the importance of promoting multidimensional literacy through teaching reading for EFL contexts and the lack of studies in multidimensional literacy in EFL settings, this current study sets out to propose a framework for developing a multidimensional literacy through reading texts and tasks.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper reports library research which intends to propose a conceptual framework for promoting multidimensional literacy through texts and activities. Multidimensional theory (Kucer, 2014) is used as the major theory, integrated with key points about reading text selection and reading tasks from several experts (Caccamise et al., 2017; Grant et al., 2007; Huang, 2013; Lewis & Dahbany, 2008; Nation, 2008).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed framework of multidimensional literacy through texts and tasks can be described as follow:

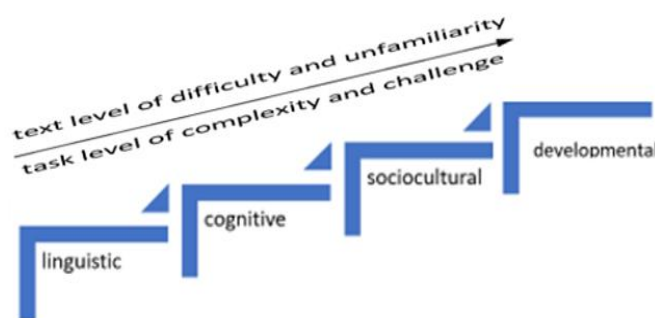


Figure 1. A proposed framework of multidimensional literacy

As seen in Figure 1, this proposed framework of multidimensional literacy integrates Kucer (2014) proposed stages of multidimensional literacy with texts and tasks level of difficulty. The selection of texts should be levelled, progressing from easy and familiar to difficult and new.

In the first stage, *linguistic*, the selected text should be easy and familiar to students, so that it does not discourage learners' motivation to read. Moreover, in this level learners still struggle with language capability and its linguistic aspects. Their exposure to reading texts is still limited, so the tasks should also be easy so that learners are successful in doing the tasks (Nation, 2008). Complex tasks may result in learners' failure to accomplish the tasks successfully. With the use of texts that can generate learners' interest in reading, it is expected that they will continue reading until the next level of literacy. In the beginning level, the use of native language (Jafarigohar & Khanjani, 2014) to work with the EFL texts might be more dominant as learners still have minimum exposure and experience in using the target language. Yet, as more texts are given reasonably, they will eventually demonstrate progress in reading, with more vocabulary acquisition and familiarity with linguistic features of the target language. The first stage of multidimensional literacy can also be perceived as the phase to generate learners' interest in reading, so teacher must be 'gentle' in this stage. Not pushing and demanding too much on learners will eventually help learners to grow their reading interest. Quite a lot of assistance might be provided so that learners do not give up when they encounter difficulties during their reading activity.

The second stage, which is *cognitive*, should allow learners to develop their thinking process higher than the linguistic level. Thus, the selected texts should be less easy and less familiar, so that their thinking is challenged. The tasks should also go one level from the linguistic stage in terms of their challenge and variety. Questions of the task should not only deal with linguistic aspect, but also elicit learners to develop their thinking. More critical questions that lead to thinking development should be given rather than questions that concern language. Learners need to be given challenging and various tasks. This is concurrent with Nation (2008) who emphasizes that moderate challenge indicates a good reading task, as it stimulates learners to make effort in accomplishing it. With considerable challenge of text and task, learners will feel the urge to read and accomplish the given task.

In the third stage, *sociocultural*, the literacy moves beyond reading for comprehension and cognitive process. It is where literacy is used to construct a social identity (Kucer, 2014) and to transact with other people. Thus, the level of texts difficulty and unfamiliarity increases as well as the degree of having complex, challenging tasks. This is the phase in which the role of both text and task stimulates learners to develop awareness of the existing society and culture, and to be critical in the society. With text and task challenge that goes up one level above cognitive stage, learners are exposed with social

issues that develop critical responses and cultural understanding (Porto, 2013). They are also stimulated to share their perspectives towards sociocultural issues in the real life, such as poverty, education, injustice, etc. The role of text and task is to shape learners' ideology and construct their identity as a social being (Kucer, 2014). Hence, it is crucial for teachers to select texts that are not against national ideology or local wisdom. On the other hands, the chosen texts should strengthen learners' sense of belonging to their nation.

In the last stage, *developmental*, the text and task level of challenge is the highest. According to Kucer(2014) it is where learners undergo the process of literacy development from being a code breaker and code maker (in the linguistic stage), a meaning maker (in the cognitive phase), and a text user and critic (in the developmental phase). This is the most challenging stage yet ultimate goal of literacy. In the context of teaching and learning, learners are in touch with texts and tasks at the highest level of complexity. Varied texts and tasks are also given. In this developmental stage, learners may also show different speed and use of context according to their experience and time consumed in reading (Kucer, 2014).

Through all the four stages, various reading strategies can be introduced to support learners' success in reading. Scanning, skimming, paired reading, and speed reading (Nation, 2008) can be taught so that learners can be a skillful reader. As highlighted by Jetton & Alexander (2001), reading instruction has a goal to make learners a skillful reader that can help them to solve problems related to interpretation of texts. A skillful reader automatically applies strategies in their routine reading activities. In the context of multidimensional literacy, it should be highlighted that the purpose of applying reading strategies not only help learners interpret meanings but also to make them undergo the process in each stage properly.

4. CONCLUSION

Promoting multidimensional literacy in EFL reading classrooms might be challenging and takes a great deal of efforts. It is because EFL learners firstly have to deal with linguistic issues before moving further to the higher degree of literacies. However, multidimensional literacy is crucial to be nurtured and developed, because the essential function of texts goes beyond a means to teach a language. Texts are more than media to introduce a certain linguistic pattern and to expand learners' vocabulary on the target language. Texts convey meanings that should be processed in one's thinking and elicit one's critical response towards sociocultural phenomena.

The promotion of multidimensional literacy through texts and tasks in EFL context implies the need for rich reading resources. It is, however, should not be the sole responsibility of the teachers.

Institutions that hire them should provide access to various reading resources to help the success of developing multidimensional literacy. By having a large choice of reading resources, teachers can choose texts that best facilitate learners in each stage of literacy development. Texts that can be accessed should vary in terms of its length, complexity of language, and themes.

The next implication concerns teachers' ability to design various tasks that range from easy to difficult, and simple to complex tasks. Of course, teachers' understanding about the nature of tasks in each stage of multidimensional literacy is a prerequisite so as to enable them to develop appropriate tasks. Inappropriate tasks can lead to learners' demotivation. For example, too challenging tasks for learners who still struggle at the linguistic level may discourage them to read. On the other hand, tasks that are too simple and easy will not challenge learners' critical thinking when they belong higher level of literacy. After all, teachers' knowledge about learners' level of literacy is pivotal so that suitable texts and tasks can be determined. In short, the success of promoting multidimensional literacy takes the involvement of teachers and their institution.

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