

Exploring Multimodality in Teaching Writing: A Narrative Inquiry of an English Teacher in an Indonesian Senior High School

Anjar Nur Cholifah¹, Doni Alfaruqy¹, Harits Setyawan¹

¹Institut Teknologi Sumatera, Indonesia

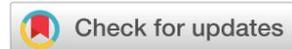
*Correspondence: anjar.cholifah@dkv.itera.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Using multimodality in teaching second language writing allows English teachers to creatively combine two or modes in describing what goes on at each stage of the writing process. Studies confirmed that multimodality in teaching English as a foreign language could help to activate classroom atmosphere and inspiring students' motivation. However, studies focusing on multimodality in teaching writing are still limited. Thus, this study aims at exploring the modes employed by the teacher in teaching writing and investigating how the teacher combined those methods in describing each stage of the writing process. By using narrative inquiry, the researchers obtained the data mainly by using the semi-structured interview. The participant of this study was an English teacher in a high school. The findings stated that a teacher employed modes like visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement in teaching writing. The teacher then combined those modes in describing stages of the writing process by designing some activities involving students' active participation and group work. This study has implications for teachers and researchers interested in exploring multimodality in teaching English particularly in writing and generally in other skills, listening, speaking, and reading.

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KEYWORDS

Multimodality, Second Language Writing, Narrative Inquiry.

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1. Introduction

Teaching writing in an EFL context is often considered a complex task. Writing involves both cognitive and social processes as it functions not only as a means of communication but also as a way of developing ideas and thoughts (Freedman & Daiute, 2001; Aswad et al., 2019; Weda et al., 2022). Because of this complexity, ineffective teaching strategies may occur in writing classrooms (Nasser, 2016; Andini et al., 2026; Usti et al., 2023). In second language contexts, writing instruction requires students to develop composing skills as well as knowledge about texts, contexts, and readers (Hyland, 2003; Suma et al. 2026; Yaumi et al., 2023).

One approach that can support writing instruction is multimodality. Through multimodality, teachers can integrate various modes such as visual elements, gestures, classroom layout, and digital media to explain ideas and guide students through the writing process (Said et al., 2021; Rahman, 2018; Asha et al., 2026). Teachers may combine printed writing with multimodal compositions or redesign learning activities by integrating multimodal resources (Nash, 2018). By bringing multimodal composing practices into writing classrooms, students can develop a broader understanding of writing across different contexts, both in digital and traditional environments (Shepherd, 2018). This approach may also help students see connections between their everyday writing experiences and classroom practices.

Previous studies have explored multimodality in English language teaching and demonstrated its potential to improve learning outcomes. Howell (2018) examined the use of a framework that combines conventional and digital tools to enhance argumentative writing. Morell (2018) investigated classroom modes such as layout, teacher posture, and spoken resources, showing that the use of multiple modes simultaneously can support better classroom organization and student engagement. Similarly, Mohammadi and Shirvan (2018) analyzed how semiotic resources such as language, gestures, and body movements contribute to interactive classroom environments and help teachers build relationships with students.

In teaching writing, the writing process itself includes several stages such as planning, drafting, and revising (McKay, 2008; Hyland, 2003). Writing is also considered a recursive and problem-solving process in which writers move between

stages to achieve their communicative goals (Hartle, 2008). Teachers can facilitate this process through activities such as brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising texts before the final editing stage (Raimes, 1992; Yaumi et al., 2024; Kaharuddin et al., 2025). In addition, integrating multimodal resources in writing instruction may support students in understanding genre structures and composing texts effectively, particularly when teachers apply a genre-based approach in the classroom (Maybin in Brindley, 2005).

Although several studies have examined multimodality in language teaching, many of them focus on higher education contexts or general classroom interaction. Research that specifically investigates how multimodality is used in teaching writing at the senior high school level is still limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore how multimodality is employed by a teacher in teaching writing and how different modes are combined in explaining the stages of the writing process in a senior high school context.

2. Methodology

This research aims at exploring the modes employed by the teacher in teaching writing and investigating how the teacher combine those modes in describing each stage of the writing process in the form of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a way of doing research that focuses on the stories we tell about our lives (Barkhuizen, 2016). This kind of method form involves the use of stories as data or as a means of presenting findings – that is based on the sociological and psychological literature but is grounded in published empirical research within the field of language teaching and learning (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Wherever the research approach involves development over time, narrative is likely to play a part, either in the nature of the data that is analyzed (open-ended questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, diaries, observation notes, and recall protocols often include narratives or take a narrative form) or in writing up the findings (Barkhuizen, et al, 2014). Furthermore, Barkhuizen et al. also stated that in narrative inquiry, interviews are mainly used to elicit oral accounts of language learning and teaching experiences.

The participant of this research is an English teacher in one of the senior high schools in Surakarta, Central Java. The teacher is a female in the age of 42 years. She has been teaching English for almost 15 years. She has joined some seminars, workshops, and TOT (Training of Trainers) about teacher development for years. In 2017, she joined a workshop on national curriculum instructor, national English Olympiad, and preparation for national examination blueprint. In 2018, she joined a workshop on research and development, digital learning, teaching, and learning based on TPACK (Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge), empowering teacher competence, scientific papers, discussion on teaching material and assessment, career policy for teachers, review, and dissemination of research result for outstanding teachers. She has also consistently and actively participated in various seminars and workshops up to the present time.

The data of the research were oral narrative data which collected by conducting semi-structured interview consisting of some questions as the guideline (Barkhuizen, 2016) The interview conducted on November and December 2024. It was recorded by using a mobile device and then transcribed into some sentences. The way of analyzing data here is used a short story analysis. Short stories are excerpts of data extracted from a broader set of data such as conversations, interviews, written narratives, and multimodal digital stories. They are analyzed in detail for both content and context and in relation to few other short stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006).

In terms of content, attention is systematically paid in the analysis to three intersecting dimensions of narrative: who, or the characters in the story, their relationships and their positions vis-à-vis each other; where, or the places and sequences of places in which the story action takes place; and when, or the time in which the action unfolds, past, present and future (Barkhuizen, 2016).

Concerning context or scales, there are three interconnected levels of the story (or contextual spaces) which not only help guide analysis but also encourage the researcher to look beyond the immediate contexts of teachers in their classrooms. The first level of the story (all small letters) is personal and embodies the inner thoughts, emotions, ideas, and theories of the teachers. It includes the social interactions in the teachers' immediate contexts, for example, during classroom lessons, during conversations with students, and in teacher journals. The second level of Story (with a capital S) spreads wider than the immediate psychological and interpersonal context of teachers. Included here are interactions with institutional members outside the classroom, consequences of decisions made typically by others in the work environment, as well as their attitudes, expectations, and prescriptions: e.g., a school's language-in-education policy and assessment practices. At this level of Story, teachers usually have less agency to construct their practice, their identities, and their stories. Lastly, STORY (in capital letters) refers to the broader sociopolitical contexts in which teaching and learning take place. Here teachers have even less power to make decisions about conditions which influence their practice. Examples of STORIES include national language policies and curriculums imposed on schools by Ministries of Education.

The use of capital letters to refer to this level of STORY merely signifies a moreful, macro scale and the power often associated with it (Barkhuizen, 2008).

The aspects of content and context interact together to create a narrative space within which the research questions are answered, and short story analysis is conducted.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

We have chosen two short stories told by the participant that is related to our research questions. The first story is about modes or multimodality employed by the participant in teaching writing. In this story, the participant taught writing in the classroom by integrating modes to deliver the idea of writing. The second story tells about how the participant combined those modes or multimodalities in describing stages of the writing process.

Short Story 1: What modes/multimodality employed by the teacher in teaching writing? (I: Interviewer, P: Participant)

Speaker	Statement
I	Do you employ visual display in teaching writing, especially step by step writing process?
P	I taught descriptive text about tourism spot. I started by showing the picture of Prambanan Temple, then continued by modelling the text and reading it. I explained the parts of descriptive text using LCD as visual display.
I	So, the visual display here means PowerPoint presentation and pictures, right?
P	Yes.
I	Did you face any difficulty in using those modes (PowerPoint presentation and picture) in teaching writing?
P	So far, I didn't meet any difficulties.
I	What about the classroom layout? Did you also manage it?
P	I conducted an integrated teaching method. I started with visual display or pictures. When I explained the text structure and content, I set the class into groups and arranged the chairs and tables.
I	What about voice quality and posture? Did you consider those modes affecting the teaching process?
P	I realized that voice quality is important since voice is also part of teaching listening skills. However, I do not pay much attention to gestures. For body movement, I often approach students when facilitating and mentoring them.

Who: The participant is the central figure of in this story. She is an English teacher in one of the senior high schools in Surakarta, Central Java. The teacher is a female in the age of 42 years. She has been teaching English for almost 15 years. She spent 24 hours per week teaching English in the classroom. Based on the short story above, she facilitated teaching writing by employing power point presentation and picture as shown in LCD (line 4 and 5). She started the class by showing the picture of Prambanan Temple. It means that she uses modes (picture and power point presentation) in the teaching and learning process in writing a lesson. Furthermore, she also set classroom layout by arranging tables and chairs in the classroom (line 16). The setting of the teaching and learning process is by grouping the students into some groups, after that she set the students' tables and chairs. It can be concluded that the other mode that she used in the class when teaching writing is classroom layout. Moreover, she managed the voice quality but did not pay attention concerning gesture (line 19 and 20). Concerning body movement, the participant also considers that this is important to teach writing. In brief, she has been teaching writing by optimizing multimodality (visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement) even she realized it or not.

Where: The participant deliberated in her story that the central action took place in a classroom. She told the story of how she managed the class by setting the students' chairs and tables. Furthermore, she also described how she used

the visual display as one of the modes in multimodality in teaching and learning process. On a larger scale, she told the moment to point out what a teacher can probably do in that kind of situation.

When: The story of the participant taught writing in her class by integrating multimodality takes over a long period. However, the participant still remembers the moment. The story probably covered up in a longer time scale to enrich her knowledge and elaborate the way in teaching writing toward modes in multimodality. So, after analyzing and making interpreting the short-stories, it can be concluded that the participant did demonstrate struggles with what is meant by teaching writing by integrating modes in multimodality. She used modes at the same time when teaching writing in the classroom. In the literature, multimodality is characterized therefore by the presence and use of a multiplicity of modes which sees meaning in visual displays, in classroom layout, in the voice-quality of the teacher, in diagrams and wall display, in students' posture, just as much as in what is said, written, and read (Kress, et al, 2005). However, when teaching writing, the participant used modes like visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement.

Short Story 2 (The Teacher's Way to Combine Modes in Teaching Writing)

I: Interviewer, P: Participant

Speaker	Statement
I	Mam, could you please tell me more about how you combine multimodality such as visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement in teaching writing?
P	I started by visualizing the context, as I said before, by using a PowerPoint presentation and a picture of a famous temple. Then I conducted modelling of the text about Prambanan Temple. I clarified some important aspects such as the genre, the social function of the text, the generic structure, and the language features commonly used in that genre.
P	After that, I focused on teaching students how to write by directing them to compose an authentic descriptive text. Therefore, I designed an authentic assignment as well. I asked the students to visit a place that is worth promoting. They described the place based on several indicators given in the worksheet, such as location, attraction, exciting spots, and atmosphere, and then composed the information into a descriptive text.
P	The next step was that they had to take some photos of the place and create a short video. They could create a vlog or use movie maker to produce a spoken descriptive text.
I	Ok, I see. So the product is complete, including both written and spoken descriptive texts.
P	Yes.
I	Did you ask the students to submit the products to you? Did you also ask them to send the products via email or upload them to social media?
P	I asked them to submit the products directly to me. I did not ask them to upload them yet. The students found the series of activities exciting to do.

Who: The central participant here was the teacher herself. The other character in the story was the students in her English class whom we heard that they felt interested in such kind of writing activity conducted by the teacher. By considering who the characters were in this story and their relationships – how they relate to each other – we are already (at this early stage of analysis) beginning to develop an understanding of the participant's identities, who demonstrated the teaching series so complete and exciting. The participant's story made it clear that she delivered a step by step teaching action in term of teaching writing descriptive text. By doing this, she combined various multimodalities (as heard from the story) like a power point presentation, picture, classroom layout for grouping, a worth promoting place/spot, a worksheet containing indicators of writing descriptive text, photos, videos, vlog, movie maker.

Where: The central action of the story unfolds mainly in the classroom in which she delivered the process of teaching writing. On a larger scale, she established a connection with the surrounding area/place which she addressed as a place/spot which was worth promoting. She did not address tourism attractions since she wanted the product created by the students to be more authentic than before.

When: The complete teaching scenario described in the story took place over a long period. However, the participant still remembers the moment. The story probably covered up on a longer time scale to enrich her knowledge and elaborate the way she combined some multimodality in teaching writing. It concluded that the participant did demonstrate a detailed step in teaching writing by combining modes in multimodality. She used modes (visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement) when teaching writing in the classroom. She chose what modes were suitable for the situation of teaching. In the literature, models of multimodality assert that all modes are partial, that is, all modes, including the linguistic modes of writing and speech, contribute to the construction of meaning in different ways (Jewitt, 2008).

3.2 Discussion

The present narrative inquiry study had two main research questions: 1) What mode or multimodality employed by the teacher in teaching composing process of writing and 2) How the teacher combines those modes or multimodalities in describing stages of the writing process. The previous main question was the realization of effective pedagogy has much to do with multimodal competence, the ability to understand the combined potential of various modes for making and eliciting meaning by (Morell, 2018). The analysis of the participant's stories has shown that she employed modes (visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement) when teaching writing in the classroom. She chose what modes were suitable for the situation of teaching. These findings are in line with what Kress et al. (2005) found in their study that in teaching and learning English, the teachers employ a multimodal with modes that they mentioned; visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, wall display, and gesture.

From the perspective of teaching and learning process in writing class, the participant used modes, but interestingly, she sometimes did not realize that she has used multimodality in her teaching and learning process. This was apparent throughout the interview when she mentioned: "I realized about my voice quality, but for the gesture, I do not give attention, and I did not realize about that." It was different from the previous study which conducted by Kress et al. (2005). The participants have set the classroom layout from the beginning, made us the visual display in the classroom in teaching and learning process Morell in 2018 also stated that the participant of her research has realized the gesture and gazed in teaching and learning process.

Concerning the process of combining those modes in teaching writing, the participant's activities categorized as a successful process. The participant could combine modes in teaching writing by using Hyland concept. The process of writing by (Hyland, 2003) covers language structures, text functions, themes or topics, creative expression, composing processes, content, genre, and context of writing. Furthermore, the participant could teach writing by combining modes, and it is mentioned in the interview before (short story 2).

Overall, the findings of this research support the concept of multimodality in any teaching and learning English stated by Kress in 2001, then followed by Jewitt, Ogborn, and Tsatsarelis in 2014. The modes that appear in several modes are 'in use' at the same time: the layout of the classroom remains –more or less – fixed, as does the display on the walls; teachers take up certain, always meaningful, positions in the space of the classroom, textual objects are present and usually, but not always, all this is enveloped in talk (Kress et al., 2005). In summary, the participant could employ modes (visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement) at the same time when teaching writing.

4. Conclusion

Multimodality in English language teaching in high school level especially focused on the writing skills the core of this article. Employing a narrative inquiry research method, this study explored how an English teacher in a high school employed multimodality in teaching writing. The findings showed that multimodality in teaching writing does exist in the form of various modes like visual display, classroom layout, voice quality, gesture, and body movement. The teacher combined those modes at the same time to deliver the process of writing that focused on composing process and genre. These ideas are in line with the concept of multimodality in any teaching and learning English stated by Kress in 2001, then followed by Jewitt, Ogborn, and Tsatsarelis in 2014. It is recommended for future teachers and researchers to conduct research analyzing more about multimodality realization in teaching learning process focused on the other aspects like in lesson plan preparation, assessment process, and or reflective teaching process. Moreover, future teachers and researchers could conduct the research by integrating multimodality in other skills like speaking, listening, and reading.

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