The Needs of EFL Students for Multimodal Text in Writing

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Abstract
Writing skills are required for EFL students to communicate ideas, ensure clear communication, and maintain the interest of the reader. In connection with the pace of technological development in the digital world, the use of multimodal text to improve writing skills is also becoming increasingly important. However, the literature about the needs of EFL students that they should have about the use of multimodal text in writing tasks is still very limited. The study aims to bridge existing deficiencies by investigating the views, wants, lacks, and necessities of EFL students to integrate multimodal texts effectively into their writing activities. This research was qualitative descriptive method. Participants consisted of 52 students from the University of Riau Kepulauan Batam. Data collected through Google Forms-questioner and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive and thematic analysis was used to determine students' needs for multimodal text in their writing tasks. The findings provide recommendations to effectively meet the needs of EFL students using multimodal text in writing activities.

Keywords: Writing Activities, Multimodal Text, Multimodal Writing Task, Needs Analysis

Introduction

Writing ability is vital for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This ability is a means of disseminating knowledge in the academic sector (Sukesi et al., 2019). As a result, acquiring good writing abilities is critical for EFL students' academic and professional success in an increasingly interconnected world where English serves as a lingua franca for worldwide communication (Rao, 2019). This is the most essential talent (Y. L. Cheung, 2016), (A. Cheung, 2021)because it allows students to convey their thoughts clearly, encourage straightforward communication, and interest their readers.

Furthermore, in this digital age, the employment of numerous semiotic tools, as well as the broad acceptance of information and communication technology (ICT), leads to a shift in multiple paradigms. The move from one form of communication to different modes, and from traditional text communication to digital multi-modal communication, is one of the many recent paradigm changes occurring in the field of communication (Montero-SaizAja, 2022), (Fedorenko et al., 2021), (Bouchey et al., 2021). This quick technological advancement has also had an impact on writing practises. The concept of multimodal text developed as a result of the realisation that communication entails more than just written and spoken language. (Kress et al., 2001). To construct meaning, diverse semiotic resources, such as verbal, visual, and gestural elements, must be combined (Kress, 2010). Thus, multimodal text integrates these many modes to improve the communication potential of written works in the context of writing activities. It has gained appeal as a method of honing writing abilities. The usage of multimodal text has gained significant importance in the field of writing proficiency in the modern and ever-changing digital era(Hotson & Bell, 2021).

There is a growing interest in researching the effectiveness and implications of multimodal text writing or composition training in English as a foreign language (EFL). (Cho & Kim, 2021) observed no significant differences in the quality, content alignment, language alignment, or amount of reflection of EFL students' traditional monomodal writing versus digital multimodal composing (DMC). (Zenouzagh et al., 2023) investigated computer-mediated communication (CMC) and discovered that text-based CMC increased behavioural and cognitive engagement whereas multimodal CMC increased emotional and social engagement of the Iranian EFL students. The text-based CMC group outperformed the multimodal CMC group in terms of written quality. (Xie et al., 2021) explored the integration of SNS-based multimodal composing activities and discovered gains in EFL learners' general writing skill, legibility, lexical complexity, and syntactic complexity, especially in college-level classrooms. (Tseng, 2021) studied the impact of multimodal composing tasks on pre-service Taiwanese EFL instructors, concentrating on genre knowledge transmission facilitated by inter-semiotic links between multimodal composing and genre writing. (Suherdi, 2015) stressed the significance of using multimodal pedagogy to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) in the Indonesian setting, underlining the ideas and models relevant to multimodal teaching-learning processes. (Kang, 2021) looked on adolescent EFL learners' perceptions and practises of multimodal composition. He found, multimodal composition practises were discovered to favourably modify students' views, with creative processes described as fluid, recursive, and circular. (Lee et al., 2021) used an interactive and recursive reading-writing process using multimodal materials to demonstrate increased language richness, vocabulary use, sentential complexity, and overall expressive fluency. (A. Cheung, 2022) investigated peer interactions among EFL students participating in multimodal collaborative writing activities. Variable dynamics were seen, with a preference for texts over multimodal features. Furthermore, it emphasised the significance of cultivating peer collaborations during multimodal collaborative writing. (Jiang, 2018) investigated a digital multimodal composing (DMC) programme in a university-based EFL curriculum, indicating a wider range of identity positions for students and their various consequences on investment in English writing.

Previous studies have shown the importance of the development of multimodal text, which combines several modes such as text, images, videos, and sounds, in improving writing skills. Multimodal texts give students more tools to effectively communicate their ideas and engage their audiences. However, despite its importance, literature on the needs of students to navigate and use multimodal effectively in their writing efforts is still limited.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to add literature with a special focus on the EFL needs in relation to multimodal texts in EFL student writing tasks. To guide this investigation, the following research questions have been established: (1) how do the interests and views of students about the existence of English multimodal text? (2) What do students want on multimodal text writing activities? (3) What are the students' lacks in multimodal writing tasks? (4) What are the student's necessities for multimodal text writing?

Methods

The descriptive qualitative research method was used in this study. The study included 52 students from the second to fourth years of the English Education Study Program (EESP) at Universitas Riau Kepualauan (UNRIKA) Batam. They were deemed qualified to participate in the survey and interview because they had authored multiple texts for academic assignments since the first semester. This study's data was collected utilizing two separate instruments (a questionnaire and an interview guideline). A link to the online questionnaires, which were given in the form of a Google form, was provided to the student's WhatsApp group. Semi-structured interviews were used to corroborate and emphasize the realities revealed by the survey results. The interview was conducted in Indonesian in order for it to run smoothly and dig information that was contextually and properly targeted. It was taped over the phone and conducted via WhatsApp chats. The respondents' names are then prefaced by the letter S, which stands for "student," and followed by the sequence number (from 1 to 9), to ensure their privacy throughout the interviews and discussions. The results were subjected to both a descriptive and thematic analysis. They are classified into four groups based on the Needs-Analysis-Research questions posed for the study.

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Result and Discussion

Needs analysis is strongly related to researchers' and educators' efforts to discover "what the learners know now," "what they need to know at the end of the course," and lastly "what the learners want to know" (Nation and Macalister, 2010). According to (Harmer, 2004), Needs Analysis refers to teachers' determination of what type of writing students are likely to have to complete in the future, as well as what type of assignment and subject students have preferred in the past. Hutchinson and Waters divide needs into two categories: "target needs" and "learning needs" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1991). The word "target needs" refers to the actions that learners must perform in the goal scenario. The word "learning needs" refers to the actions that students must take in order to gain information and abilities; it includes "necessities, lacks, and desires." The method of needs analysis entails gathering data about the student's or instructor's perspectives, viewpoints, and beliefs .Students' needs are one of the factors to be considered when a teacher designs learning, the results of the needs analysis provide information related to the current needs, future and student expectations (Nation and Macalister, 2010).

Given the above foundation, needs analysis is an important component of multimodal text in writing exercises since it assists in identifying and addressing the student's individual requirements and goals. In this setting, need analysis enables educators to personalise writing exercises to students' individual multimodal text needs, abilities, and goals. If teachers understand their students' needs, they will be able to deliver appropriate learning assignments or activities depending on their students' characteristics or points of view. Instructors can construct intriguing, relevant, and demanding multimodal writing activities by knowing students' linguistic skills, past knowledge, and learning styles. This information aids in the selection of interesting and relevant multimodal texts for students, hence making writing tasks more appealing and motivating.

This study aims to investigate the students' needs of English Education Study Program of Universitas Riau Kepulauan (UNRIKA) Batam, Indonesia toward multimodal text at writing activities. Thus, it discusses the students' interests, views, wants, lacks, and necessities

Students' interests and views on the availability of multimodal texts for writing tasks
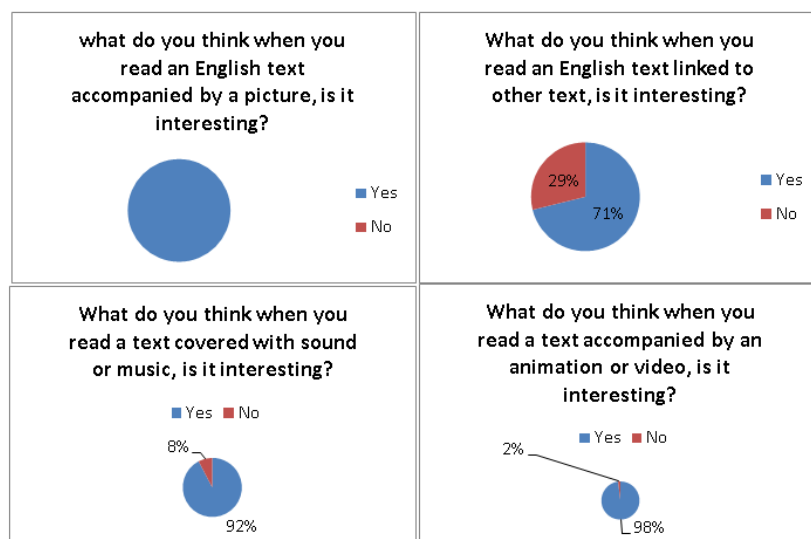

Figure 1. Students' interest in multimodal text

As seen in Figure 1, question 1 focuses to discover students' interest in pictures inserted in an English written text, the result shows that 100% of students agreed it was interesting. Then, question 2 investigate students' interest in the linked-text mode in English written text, it was found that 71% of students agreed. Next, question 3 shows that 92 % were interesting in embedding sound or music mode in English written text. Last, 98% of students were interesting in animation or video mode linked in English written text. Thus, to summarize, this finding recognizes that overall students were interesting multimodal in English written text.

Additionally, it is also informed on the interview transcription of S-2, S-5, S-6, and S-9:

"Yes, it is interesting because I am a visual type, so it is easier for me to find ideas that I will write down. (S-2), "Yes" (S-5), "yes"(S-6), "yes, that's why I am interested to read the texts"(S-9).
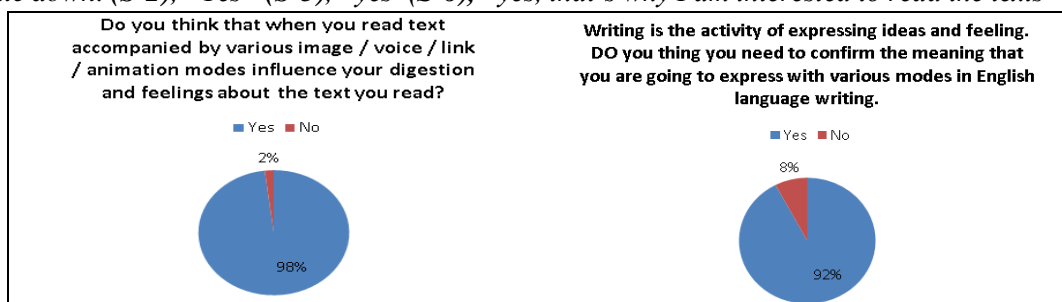
Figure 2. Students' View on Discovering and Producing Meaning through Multimodal Written Text

Based on the data found in figure 2, shows that 98% of students agreed that multimodal written text gives an impact on students' perception and feeling to interpret meaning conveyed in a text. The data also noted that 92 % of students agreed multimodal text will influence readers to feel and interpret the message of the text they wrote**.** Then, based on the interview result, students said that multimodal text helps them to look for more information they need, and easy for the student to find an idea as it is stated in the interview transcription: *"Of course, mam, because it makes it easier for us to find and explore the information that is available in the text (S2),…if we just read one article it's not enough, then accompanied by that other text, we find out again, so we know a lot more, **so it affects our understanding** (S3), " yes, it is, it adds to our understanding of the text" (S-4), "Yes, because if the text that is written is only writing, it will cause someone's unwillingness or disinterest to see or read the text that we make (S-9*

The findings of the research, which investigated the interest and views of English as a Foreign Language learners regarding the use of multimodal texts in writing assignments, serve to narrow the current void in scholarly literature. It was discovered that students exhibited a high level of enthusiasm and interest for various multimodal text types. The incorporation of images, linked-text style, sound or music, and animation or video modes into written English content was deemed captivating and appealing. In addition, the study revealed the effect of multimodal texts on students' comprehension and meaning encounter. They agreed that perusing multimodal texts had a significant impact on their capacity to comprehend and interpret the intended meaning. Multimodal texts were deemed beneficial for increasing engagement, locating relevant information, and enhancing overall comprehension.

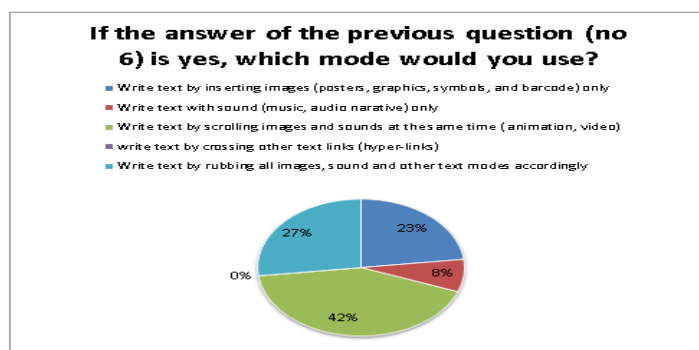**Students' wants on multimodal writing task**

Figure 3: Types of Mode Students Want

The figure above shows students' responses when asked: what mode they want to use to write multimodal text. The data shows that 42% of students want to insert images that are added with sound

both music and audio narration. 27% of them want to insert all modes, and 23% want to insert images only. The rest (8%) only want to insert the sound of music or audio narration. While based on the interview, most students are interested in applying visual modes such as images or pictures, or posters (*"...necessary, I use the image method, so that the meaning of the text is clear, the meaning is not ambiguous" (S-7) "I prefer to choose visual mode such as image, poster" (S-8), "I want to use picture mode in my writing" (S-9)*).

The data indicate that students value a combination of visual and auditory elements when creating multimodal texts, with substantial numbers desiring images accompanied by music and audio narration. According to both the data and the interview responses, there is a significant emphasis on the use of visual elements, despite the fact that a substantial number of students prefer a variety of modalities. The comments of the students demonstrate a desire for clear and unambiguous communication, which they believe can be effectively accomplished through the use of visual aids. When designing educational materials, assignments, or communication strategies involving multimodal texts, it is crucial to consider students' preferences. In conclusion, the data and interview findings highlight the importance of visual elements in the creation of effective multimodal texts, while also indicating a significant interest in combining various media forms to improve communication.
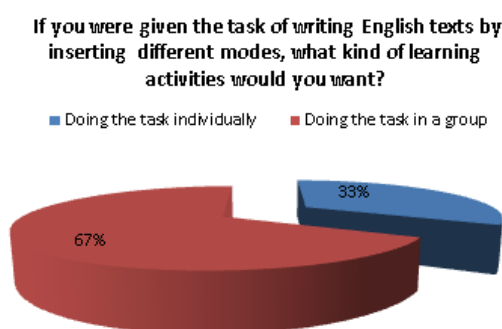

Figure 4: The activity setting students want

Figure above shows if the students are given the task of writing English text by inserting various modes, the learning activity they want to work on their course assignments is mostly in groups (67%). Only 33 % of them want to work individually. This data indicates that collaborative or group work is more appealing to a substantial portion of the student population in the context of writing English text using multiple modalities. This is in line with Cheung's research (A. Cheung, 2022) that emphasizes the importance of fostering peer collaboration during multimodal collaborative writing.

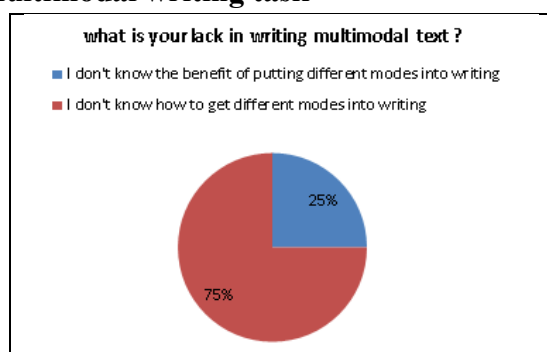**Students' lacks in the multimodal writing task**

Figure 5. Students' lacks in writing multimodal text

It can be seen in the figure above that 75% of students have obstacles to embedding multimodal in their writing. This obstacle was confirmed through interviews that they were given tasks by the lecturer to complete those that needed to apply multimodal principles. However, the lecturers of related subjects did not provide any directions or tutorials on how to produce multimodal texts, and what ICT products could be used to assist in completing the assigned tasks. As it is confirmed by S-3 follows: *"There is no direction or tutorial from lecturers how to use the application in writing the texts, we look for by ourselves, self-directed"* **(S-3)**

The results shed light on the obstacles that students face when incorporating multimodal elements into their writing. Lack of instruction and support from instructors in using multimedia components and ICT products to complete assignments appears to have hindered the students' ability to effectively incorporate these elements into their work. This information suggests a potential need for enhanced instruction and educational resources to assist students in developing the skills necessary to create effective multimodal texts.

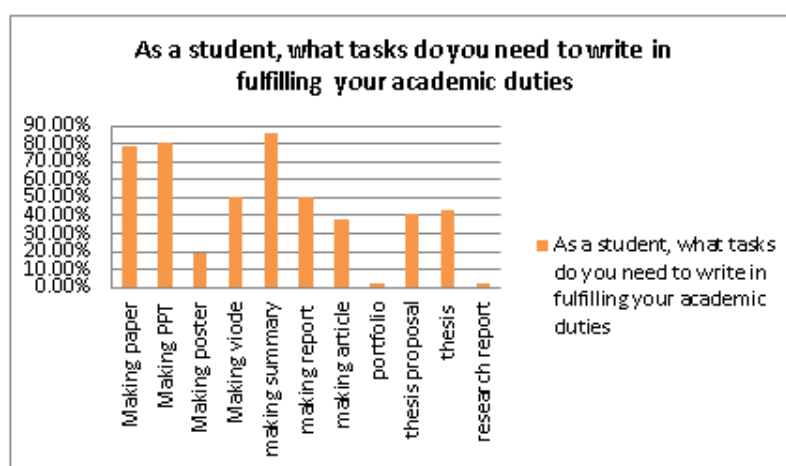## Students' necessities on the multimodal writing task

Figure 6: Students' Writing Task Necessities

The figure shows that there are some kinds of assignments that students need to do to fulfill their courses, and the three biggest are in the form of learning material summary (85.7%), PowerPoint template presentation (PPT) (81%), and making paper (78.6%). It is also emphasized through the students' answers when they were asked about what are the assignments given by the lecturer such as *"... all kinds of things, some ask for PPT later we will present it, some ask to make paper too, then we make summary paper, like summary paper, there is also summary of all the groups, there is also in our writing course, we make an outline, ..."* **(S-3).** The rest of the students also make assignments in the form of videos (50%), group assignment reports (50%), theses (42.9%), thesis proposals (40.5%), articles (38.1%), posters (19%), and research reports (2.4%).

The findings from the data reveal a wide variety of assignment types intended to assess and enhance various student skills. The prevalence of learning material summaries, PowerPoint presentations, and academic papers suggests that comprehension, communication, and research skills are emphasized. The incorporation of additional formats, such as videos, group reports, and posters, exemplifies an evolving assessment strategy that incorporates multimedia and collaborative skills.
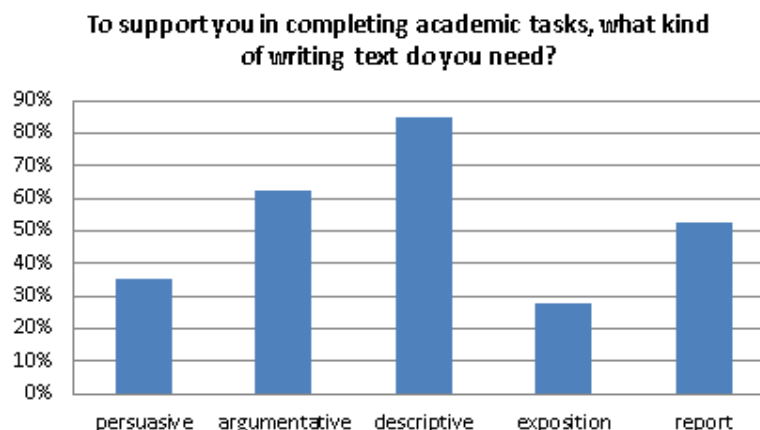
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To support you in completing academic tasks, what kind of writing text do you need?

Figure 7: Types of Text Students Require for Assignments

Regarding the types of text (genre), the data in figure 7 noted that the three higher texts students need to write are descriptive text (85%), argumentative texts (62.5%), and report texts (52.5%). The figure also shows that students also need persuasive text (35%) and exposition text (27.5%). It is almost relevant to the students' statements in the WhatsApp chats. They need those text types to fulfill their coursework assignments such as papers, essays, and learning applications. It was relevant to the students; interview results: "*In doing coursework, I often use descriptive text and exposition text where there are often papers and ppt. For the use of procedural and research texts, it is also used in making proposals and also theses*" **(S-3).** *"based on my experience in doing assignments, the texts that are often used are descriptive text, procedure text, and report text ...because when given an assignment such as making an essay, it is necessary to describe the topic from the title raised, and combine it with report text. Besides that, I have also been given the task of making a learning application, were to explain the usefulness of the application, it requires procedure text in describing and providing steps for its use"***(S-9)**

The data highlights the categories of texts that students are frequently required to compose and the relevance of these text types to their coursework assignments. It indicates that descriptive, argumentative, report, persuasive, and exposition texts are encountered and used frequently by students in their coursework assignments. In addition to reinforcing the importance of these text types in their assignments, the students' reflections illustrate how specific genres are utilized to fulfill various aspects of their course requirements.

There is a potential link between this study and a study conducted by (Taufiq et al., 2021). The difference is that this study explicitly focuses on the students' needs on multimodal approaches into the EFL writing pedagogy, whereas the Taufiq study addresses the need for appropriate learning models to meet student essay writing needs. The results of this investigation provide significant revelations regarding the students' necessities for the multimodal writing task. Comprehending these requirements is pivotal in formulating efficacious pedagogical approaches and syllabi that correspond to students' anticipations and augment their educational encounters.

Although there is no direct correlation mentioned with the Hartono's study (Hartono et al., 2018), both contribute to a wider understanding of writing in an academic context. The Hartono Study findings focus on the needs of non-English lecturers while the study focuses on student needs. By addressing the special needs of students and lecturers in writing assignments and improving writing skills, the study collectively contributes to improving academic performance and preparing individuals for academic and professional pursuit.

In terms of the broader context of academic writing , there is a connection between current studies and Gonzalez's research (González & Videgaray, 2022). Both studies recognize the importance of effective writing instruction and support to facilitate student writing development. This study emphasize

the importance of integrating multimodal writing tasks into educational programs, in line with Gonzalez's study, which highlights the need for tutors who can support students as writers. Together, the study emphasizes the need for appropriate guidance and training to improve academic writing skills.

Since the writing activity that has been popular in Indonesia is the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) (Emilia, 2005). Thus, occasions have been opened for lecturers of writing courses in Indonesia to provide opportunities for their students to learn to produce texts based on social phenomena around them (Widiati, 2016). However, it turns out that the rapid development of ICT makes the GBA approach not enough. Various multimodal and digital-based texts are widely distributed around the social life of today's students.

Most students realize that multimodal in English written text is interesting. Multimodal texts influence the readers to feel and interpret the message of the text they wrote. Then multimodal text also helps students to look for more information they need, and make student easily find an idea they wish to express. Therefore, they need to express their thought and feeling through multimodal English written text. The finding indicates that the multimodal approach needs to be incorporated into writing learning activities. Lecturers can take advantage of various modes that are supported by technological devices in mediating interactions in the process of learning and at the same time producing meaning through multimodal written texts.

The modes students want to use in producing multimodal English text are visual and audio forms such as images and narration. As students, they have had assignments that required them to apply a multimodal approach in completing their coursework, but in general, most of them did not understand how to incorporate various modes into their writing. This can be overcome by combining students who have experience in making multimodal texts with those who are not in a team. This is also in line with their wish, that they are interested in more group work activities rather than individual in producing written multimodal text.

Next, the mode students ever used mostly in completing their college assignments was in the form of a picture. This means that it is not something new for them to generate multimodal text with images. In line with that, the types of assignments that they often got in completing college assignments are in the form of learning material summary, PowerPoint template presentation (PPT), and making paper. Regarding the three types of text students need most to write are descriptive text, argumentative texts, and report texts. They need those text types to fulfill their coursework assignments such as papers, essays, and learning applications as instructional media. Thus, they need to be directed and trained to produce more dynamic and complex multimodal texts according to their needs in completing their coursework as students in universities. They need to be trained in producing multimodal texts that incorporate multimodal principles to support them in completing the tasks given by the lecturer.

In addition, they also need to be motivated to be able to find and utilize various ICT products that can support them in completing the multimodal texts they have to work on. By giving the task of making multimodal texts in the writing course, it is hoped that it will increase students' knowledge and experience in supporting the completion of other course assignments. It is because writing is a means or tool in producing written texts. This is also in line with the objectives of the academic writing course in higher education, which is to fulfill academic tasks (Rozimela & Wahyuni, 2019).

To conclude, all the results of this study bring pedagogical consideration. It can be an additional reference for educators in meeting the EFL Students' needs, and advantaging various modes in supporting writing learning activities for their students. The way educators teach and students learn English writing should modify to the current situation. It is in line with the increasing number of texts that include various modes of presentation such as symbols, web-page links, and QR codes. Such modes are produced with the help of ICT tools or digital multimedia. Each resulting mode gives a certain meaning. This phenomenon certainly forms an interest in the surrounding social community (Bezemer & Kress, 2008), including for students where the texts are distributed. Thus, it is only natural that

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"English should be learned and taught integrated with ICT in real-life contexts" (Suherdi, 2015) in maximizing students' English writing learning activities. This condition provides a wealth of learning opportunities for English writing skills (Alwasilah, 2019).

EFL Writing lecturers are suggested to embed multimodal in the writing course activities for their students. From the four parts of writing courses offered, they can direct students to take advantage of the multimodal text and to produce multimodal writing in Essay Writing Creative Writing, or Academic Writing. In this way, students have the opportunity to interpret the image and understand the context. If they want, they can capture more information they read by clicking on the video or web text, or web links inserted in the text as a reference in writing an outline. With the increase in their experience in reading multimodal texts, students may realize that each mode represents words with a certain meaning. Then they can replicate and modify the writing style of the multimodal text they found. To sum up, the results imply that embedding a multimodal approach in supporting writing learning activities is relevant to students' interest

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of incorporating multimodal texts in an EFL writing course to meet the needs of the students. The findings show that students have a high level of interest and enthusiasm to use a variety of multimodal elements, such as images, connected text styles, sound or music, and animated or video modes, in their writing tasks. Multimodal texts are considered useful for improving overall engagement, understanding, and writing skills.

The implications of this research emphasize the need to integrate Multimodal Approaches into the EFL writing pedagogy, develop appropriate learning models, and provide guidance and support to students. By addressing students' needs and improving their writing skills, educators can improve academic performance, prepare students for future endeavors, and promote meaningful learning experiences. Further research can explore specific implementation strategies and assess the long-term impact of multimodal writing activities on EFL student language and communication skills.

Acknowledgments

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