

The Implementation of Digital Multimodal Composing for Speaking and 21st-Century Skills in Vocational High School

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Abstract

English speaking skills and 21st-century competencies are crucial for vocational high school graduates, yet they remain low in Indonesia. Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC) strategies, especially when combined with a task-based approach, offer the potential to enhance both skills. Unfortunately, the implementation of DMC in this context remains rarely explored. This research aimed to explore the implementation of DMC on English-speaking and 21st-century skills in vocational high school. This is a qualitative case study, using observation and interview as data collection techniques. This study involved a class with 17 students majoring in Visual Communication Design and an English teacher. The finding revealed that the implementation of DMC followed the steps of Willis (1996) and had a great potential in developing speaking and 21st-century skills. However, the post-task stage was absent, which caused the learners to lose the opportunity to engage in linguistic review and language focus.

Keywords: *Digital Multimodal Composing (DMC), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Speaking Skills, and 21st Century Skills*

Introduction

English speaking skills and 21st-century competence mastery are crucial at this age, which demands speed, clarity, and adaptability in delivering ideas. The ability to speak English enables a faster and more effective delivery of information to wider audiences, which directly affects academic and professional success. (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). However, the Indonesians had consistent English proficiency for years, at the level of A1 and A2 (English First, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024; Setyowati et al., 2022) This indicates that the majority of Indonesian learners do not possess sufficient English language skills to communicate effectively.

The 21st century skills are unavoidable. It plays a role in preparing someone to face the dynamics and uncertainties of this era and future employment (Talmi et al., 2018). In the context of vocational high school, students are expected to be able to communicate using English as a part of professional competitiveness improvement, while also developing 21st-century skills to enable them to adapt and thrive in a global work environment. Although important, mastering speaking skills is considered challenging for EFL learners. Furthermore, the teacher also faced difficulties in integrating speaking skills into classrooms that adopt 21st-century concepts.

However, the conventional approach of English learning, specifically in speaking, often fails to provide learners with meaningful and relevant learning experiences. Many students face difficulties in expressing themselves orally due to the limited real-life

exposure context in learning. In addition, the advancement of technology in this era urged learners to foster various crucial and unavoidable skills, including technological mastery and 21st-century skills (Islam, 2020; Van Laar et al., 2017).

Responding to the challenges, the teachers are still seeking a learning strategy that can accommodate and boost students' active engagement in speaking activities, technological mastery, and 21st-century skills. In this regard, Technology-Enhanced Language Teaching offers the potential learning solution that is oriented on functional language use through communicative tasks reflecting real-life situations and professional needs.

Furthermore, combining T-TBLT and DMC strategy strengthens the English learning experience. DMC encourages learners to create digital-based work that combines various communication modes, allowing the idea to be expressed in more creative, meaningful, and personal (Hafner, 2014, 2020). Once the DMC strategy under task-based instruction is implemented in designing a speaking task, the students not only practice language skills but also foster soft skills such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and communication (4C), which are relevant to the demands of the 21st century. In the context of vocational education, this approach is beneficial in equipping learners with communicative and digital competencies to face the global workforce.

Even though DMC has big potential, the research on DMC in Speaking is limited and lacks DMC exploration on 21st-century skills. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the implementation of DMC for speaking and 21st-century skills in vocational high school. This study is expected to contribute to English teaching innovation, which is more adaptive and future-oriented

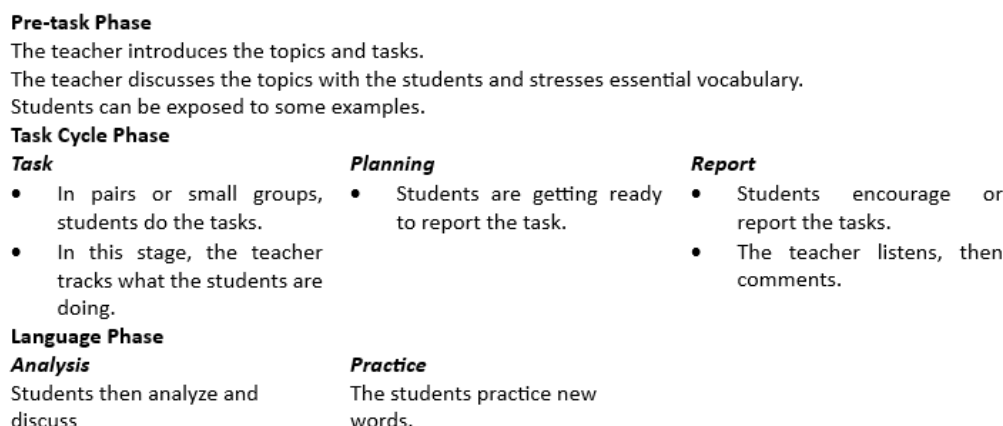
Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design. It aimed to provide a detailed description of the implementation of DMC on speaking and 21st-century skills in a vocational high school. The subject of the research involved an English teacher and 17 students majoring in Visual Communication Design in one of the vocational high schools in West Java. All of the participants involved had experienced the language learning integrated TBLT and DMC strategy. The teacher involved has been implementing TBLT and DMC for 3 years in his teaching practice.

The implementation of T-TBLT and DMC is based on school curriculum mandates, which emphasize the students' scientific and professional readiness in their field of expertise. The curriculum was designed to ensure every learning process equips students with relevant skills to their professional field and 21st-century skills needed for the workplace.

The researcher uses two data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of DMC in English teaching. The data was collected in 2025. First, the researcher conducted an observation through video, which directly documented the implementation of DMC in the context of speaking skills and 21st-century skills learning, using observation checklists. Second, a semi-structured interview with an interview guide was conducted to explore the teacher's reflection on the process of DMC implementation. The researcher developed the observation checklists and interview guide based on the TBLT framework by Willis (1996).

Figure 1. Stages of TBLT (Willis, 1996)



Results

The implementation of the DMC strategy was based on the framework by Willis (1996). Two meetings of English instruction in a vocational high school were observed utilizing the observation checklist for each meeting. Additionally, teacher reflection on DMC implementation was also explored using a semi-structured interview. These data were combined to provide more comprehensive insight into the implementation of DMC in three TBLT stages: pre-task, task cycle, and language focus phases. The implementation description of each TBLT phase of learning The description of each stage of learning implementing the DMC strategy within TBLT is provided below:

Pre-Task Phase

This phase was carried out at the first meeting. The teacher started this phase by conveying the learning purposes and relevance to the students. Here is the teacher's utterance conveying the purposes and relevance of learning found in the first-observed-meeting:

Teacher: Today, we will learn how to present our portfolios. This topic is not only school material but also practice for your future workplace. At work, this skill is important. Through this learning, you will learn how to convey who you are and what your skills are, so that other people in your work will trust you more

The teacher's response to the interview also emphasized the need to convey learning relevance to the real-world context, as stated below

Teacher.Q2: I explain the benefits of studying the material so that they are more motivated and enjoy learning (translated from Indonesian).

A preparatory activity was conducted. The teacher utilizes a guided brainstorming technique as a preparatory activity for the meeting. Here is the prompt the teacher used for guided brainstorming.

Teacher: When you are applying new job and the recruiter asks you to present your portfolio, what information should be provided in the presentation?

In terms of preparatory activity, the teacher also provides another way to prepare the students, such as introducing related vocabulary. As stated:

Teacher.Q3: Yes, I briefly introduce the material in general...related vocabulary needed..., what the sentences are like, what the words are used, and what the formula is

The introduction to the task is also found in the meeting. In addition, the teacher also provided video examples that served as task modeling, which students would create during the learning process.

Teacher.Q2: I don't just ask students to speak, but also provide video examples as references...This is so that students have a clear picture of what is expected (translated from Indonesian).

Moreover, the teacher also informed the standard set for the assignment, which would be composed by students. As stated:

Teacher.Q4A: The teacher determines the standards for their assignments, for example, in terms of the duration of the assignment.

Then, the students are given sufficient time to explore the topic by themselves, plan and prepare their task before entering the task cycle phase. stage.

Teacher.Q3E: ...they are also instructed to study the material more deeply, independently, or in groups. Then prepare what is needed to take the video, after that, the students take the video. (translated from Indonesian)

Task Cycle Phase

In the whilst task stage, the process of learning focused on task conducting. The task cycle phase was conducted in the first and second meetings. At this stage, learning activities further develop 21st-century and English language skills. As the teacher stated

Teacher.Q3E: In this school, we make assignments like in the world of work... students create something, they will definitely think more critically and creatively than just answering questions... by group assignments, students will also collaborate and communicate with the team...

In this phase, based on the observation, the student began conducting their task, which involved simulating, recording, integrating multimodal items, and editing the video. The teacher's utterance gave additional information regarding the process of task completion:

Teacher.Q3E: "Then they also often work together to do group assignments... If it is a group assignment, students will divide their roles and must practice with their friends." (translated from Indonesian)

While students worked on their draft, the teachers checked their progress, gave feedback on the draft, and monitored their engagement with the task. This teacher's action observed in the meeting is supported by the teacher's utterance in the interview process.

Teacher.Q5B: I'll take a look and check the script first. I'll look at them one by one (translated from Indonesian)

Once they finished their tasks, the tasks were collected and presented in the classroom. This is supported by the teacher's utterance below:

Teacher.Q4B: When the project is presented, they don't present anymore because they have already presented what they understand through the video they made, and they practice what they have learned.

The feedback session was done after the presentation, allowing the students and teachers to deliver questions or feedback to the presenter. This is aligned with the teacher's utterance in answering question 5:

Teacher.Q5: The feedback session is not too rigid. If the children want to respond, they are welcome to do so (translated from Indonesian).

Student C : Maybe the size of the font is too small, so it is hard to read

Student A : Thank you for your suggestion

Excerpt 1. Feedback by Student

- Teacher** : Nice, thank you for the great presentation, Student A, and thank you for the feedback. I want to clarify something, you said 'graphic' wrong, it should be /'græf.ɪk/
- Student A** : /'græf.ɪk/ miss ? Thank you, miss

Excerpt 2. Feedback by Teacher

Language Focus Phase

The data from observation, this stage was not carried out at the first and second meetings. In this phase, both the teacher and the students should reflect on language use. In addition, the teacher explained the reason for the absence of the language focus phase in the interview, saying:

Teacher.Q6: The language aspect is only discussed during the pre-task, before making a video project.... It's not reviewed continuously, because there are many assignments to do... (translated from Indonesian)

Discussion

This study confirmed that the learning process was conducted using the T-TBLT approach, with the roots of the TBLT framework and DMC tasks as the core of learning.. The process learning followed the TBLT stages proposed by Willis (1996), involving the stages of pre-task, task cycle, and language focus phase. However, the data obtained from observation and interview indicated that not all TBLT stages were carried out by the teacher.

In the pre-task stage of DMC implementation based on T-TBLT, the teacher conveyed the learning aims linked to the real-world context to build and raise learners' motivation and engagement. It is aligned with a study that revealed an increase in student engagement with an authentic, real-world context compared to a non-real-world context (Chang et al., 2024). The activities of guided brainstorming, vocabulary activation, and task modelling served as task schematic preparations (Willis, 1996), enabling learners to build their conceptual framework before they composed their speaking task in the form of multimodal content. Additionally, a study on schema activation has also proven its benefits in supporting language acquisition and speaking improvement (Alimohamadi & Poordaryiaenejad, 2015). Aligning with Kress (2010), DMC emphasizes the importance of visual and audio representation in language learning; therefore, the combination of both contextual explanation and multimodal modelling in the pre-task stage helps increase students' cognitive readiness to be actively involved in the multimodal speaking task later in the next stage. The activity to plan the task involved individual exploration of the topic, discussion, development of a task outline, and preparation of supporting multimodal items. The activity to explore the topic by themselves is crucial, and it is supported by a research finding that giving the students freedom to explore the topic at their own pace contributed to the success of learning (Rahmawati & Setyowati, 2024).

In the task cycle phase, students are actively involved in the collaborative multimodal video composing process, with English as the medium of communication. This project is not only beneficial for students' speaking skills, but also encourages the enhancement of students' 21st-century skills, as collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity. It is supported by various research studies that indicated communicative and task-oriented instructional strategies promote critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (Bohari, 2020; Wen, 2024; Wikanengsih & Rostikawati, 2024; Yunikawati & Tuanani, 2022). In addition, other studies revealed and

strengthened that TBLT assists learners in fostering 21st-century skills by providing real-life tasks as the core of learning, critical thinking, and technology, which promotes personalized instruction (Keo et al., 2024) and learning autonomy (Masita, 2016).

In conducting the task, students were required to transform their knowledge and information into a draft outline script, share roles, do a simulation, record and edit the video, and also integrate the multimodal elements into the product. In this activity, the teacher acted as a facilitator who provided scaffolding through script checking and feedback delivery. Students' autonomy on media integration is not limited. Through the DMC-based speaking task, learners not only practice speaking English but also enhance their communicative skills by designing a strategy for delivering information digitally, creatively, and contextually using various modes of communication. With this approach, the message conveyed becomes more meaningful and easier to understand. It is supported by a study that revealed that a digital multimodal product, which aligns with DMC in terms of using various semiotic modes, was effective in supporting language learning; particularly in speaking (Afifah et al., 2023; Nugroho & Anugerahwati, 2019). In the last activities of the whilst-task stage, students' work is presented to the class. The presentation was followed by feedback from both the teacher and students. The feedback given was explicit and focused on form. This session provides students with a platform to practice critical thinking skills and enhance peer interaction using English in an academic context.

In contrast to the pre-task and task cycle past, which have been done consistently. The language focus was absent from observed learning practice. The teacher did not direct the students to engage in the language focus activities: analysis and practice. Whereas, according to Willis (1996), the language focus functions as a phase to reinforce the accuracy and awareness in language use. A study found students' tendency to transfer the competencies of their first language to the foreign language they are learning (Muzaki, 2021). The absence of the post-task stage in DMC-based TBLT implementation has the potential to reinforce systematic errors in language use. This also implies that the observed learning practice was more focused on fluency rather than language accuracy.

Conclusion

Based on observations and teacher reflections, the implementation of Digital Multimodal Composing using the T-TBLT framework indicates that the DMC has a great potential in supporting and improving students' English speaking skills and 21st-century skills. However, its implementation in a vocational high school has not fully met all the Willis' stages of TBLT (1996). Only the pre-task and task cycle phases were conducted effectively with the support of the DMC strategy and collaborative activities. However, the absence of a language phase indicates that the learning focus is on communication fluency, and the lack of attention to linguistic accuracy and learning reflection, which is potentially inhibiting the enhancement of linguistic understanding. To obtain the maximum benefit of DMC implementation in English learning, it is suggested that teachers integrate all pedagogical TBLT stages: pre-task, task cycle, and language phase. In addition, this is a case study in a specific vocational high school that can not be generalized; future research should explore the DMC on speaking and 21st-century skills in the wider community.

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