

Exploring Undergraduate Students' Experiences Reading Multimodal Texts in an EFL Reading Classroom: Evidence from Indonesia

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article history: Received: 27 Sep 2023 Last revised: 10 Mar 2026 Accepted: 12 Mar 2026 Available online: 20 Mar 2026</p> <p>Keywords: Narrative frame Reader-viewer Multimodal texts</p>	<p><i>Despite a plethora of research interest in teaching reading over the past few years, scant attention has been paid to exploring undergraduate students' experiences of reading multimodal texts in the EFL landscape. This study seeks to fill this gap by capturing undergraduate students' experiences of enacting the role of reader-viewers as text navigators, designers, interrogators, and interpreters of multimodal texts in an EFL academic reading course where the first author served as the instructor. Five undergraduate students (two females, aged 19–20 years) were recruited as participants in this study. Data were derived from the students' narrative frames, a story template consisting of incomplete sentences and a blank space to capture their experiences of reading multimodal texts. The data were qualitatively analyzed using content analyses. The findings demonstrated that the use of a narrative frame enabled the students to reflect on and explore their experiences of enacting the reader-viewer in multimodal texts. Drawing on the findings, this study suggests that undergraduate students expand their reading practice by enacting the reader-viewer role in multimodal texts, thereby enabling them to develop multimodal reading competence.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the use of multimodal texts in language, reading, and literacy learning and instruction from a wide range of perspectives has been well documented (Batchelor et al., 2025; Chan & Zhang, 2017; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Karatza, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Puripunyanich, 2025; Singer et al., 2022; Unsworth, 2014; Wang, 2022). In the context of tertiary education, the debate over multimodal texts in EFL reading teaching is ongoing. For example, Tungka (2018) underscores how adopting guided literacy in reading multimodal texts enables students to build and develop their knowledge and digital literacy in EFL

contexts. In support of this perspective, Papadopoulou et al. (2018) revealed that multimodality courses enable university students to hone their multimodal literacy. Collectively, these studies suggest that a balanced approach that integrates multimodal texts into reading instruction is essential for promoting students' multimodal literacy.

The contemporary 21st-century educational landscape is characterized by the use of digital and web texts as source materials for teaching reading. Singer Trakhman et al. (2022) investigated the effects of processing multimodal texts in print and digitally on the comprehension and calibration of undergraduate students' learning. The results showed that undergraduate students often demonstrated poor calibration, with a tendency to overestimate their understanding, especially when interacting with multimodal texts in digital formats. Furthermore, Kuhn et al. (2022) showed that the findings related to the digital reading access, attitudes, motivation, skills, behavior, and support, they posited that the divergent reading encounters among students are associated with disparities in access to higher education. In summary, the results challenge the prevailing digital strategies focused solely on enhancing access to digital materials within academia to equalize opportunities in higher education. This study collectively advocates for educators to acknowledge the richness of multimodal texts and consider designing reading materials, thereby creating a more nurturing and effective way of boosting students' reading comprehension.

As narratives evolve from being conveyed through texts to being presented visually, the literature of the 21st century will demand fresh proficiencies, approaches, and novel educational methods to aid students in engaging with these multifaceted and multimedia texts (Kress, 2003; Mills et al., 2025; Serafini, 2011). This transition from focusing on single-mode, print-centered texts to emphasizing the competencies essential for both creating and consuming multimodal texts necessitates that readers skillfully traverse, craft, construe, and dissect texts in novel, more interactive manners (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Serafini, 2012a; Unsworth, 2014). Multimodal texts that incorporate written content, visual depictions, graphical components, hyperlinks, video segments, audio snippets, and other modes of representation require distinct techniques for navigation and comprehension (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Following this, Serafini (2011) proposed a reconceptualized role of the reader-viewer as a (a) navigator, (b) designer, (c) interrogator, and (d) interpreter in reading multimodal texts.

Despite a growing body of research investigating reading multimodal texts in the EFL reading classroom and digital literacy concerning the exploration of multiple modes of text elements and features of multimodal texts (Dang, 2024; Lee, 2021; Lee & Hong, 2022; Pathomchaiwat & Thongrin, 2025; Serafini, 2012a), there is little empirical evidence exploring students' life experiences reading journal websites as multimodal texts in EFL reading. Against this backdrop, the present study aims to report students' experiences in reading multimodal texts and explore the role of reader-viewers in this new digital era. To guide this study, we propose the following two research questions:

- a) How do EFL reading classroom students in Indonesia perceive their experiences while engaging with multimodal texts?
- b) To what extent do students understand the role of reader-viewers as text navigators, designers, interrogators, and interpreters in reading journal websites?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of the literature on the transition from monomodal to multimodal texts, the enactment of the four resources model, and students' experiences enacting the reader-viewer through narrative frames.

The evolving four roles in reading multimodal texts

Modern educators and literacy experts have observed a shift away from the dominance of traditional printed texts towards a greater emphasis on visual imagery and multimodal forms of communication (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Kress, 2010). In this context, people encounter multimodal texts that combine visual images and graphic design elements more frequently than texts composed solely of written language (Fleckenstein, 2002). It is important to note that multimodal and print-based texts are not mutually exclusive. Even in printed materials, visual components such as fonts and design elements exist, whereas multimodal texts typically incorporate written language. Readers continue to engage with traditional print-based texts that include multimodal elements such as picture books, informative materials, magazines, newspapers, and contemporary multimodal texts that feature visual images, hypertext, videos, music, sounds, and graphic designs. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) contend that in most social and textual contexts, texts, written texts are frequently accompanied by visual images.

In essence, multimodal texts combine multiple modes of communication. These modes include photography, music, sculpture, and written language. A mode refers to a system of signs devised by humans to represent and convey meaning in different cultural contexts. Humans have developed these modes to express ideas and facilitate communication (Serafini, 2012b). Therefore, when a text incorporates more than one mode, it is categorized as a multimodal text. In this study, we provide a journal website as a multimodal text to expand students' ability to enact reader-viewers as text navigators, designers, interrogators, and interpreters. Journal websites can help students make sense of information for academic purposes (Groenke & Prickett, 2012). The significance of the evolving four roles in social practices lies in their crucial function as the theoretical foundation for becoming a proficient reader of web pages (Hasset & Curwod, 2011; Serafini, 2012b). Examples of journal websites are as follows:

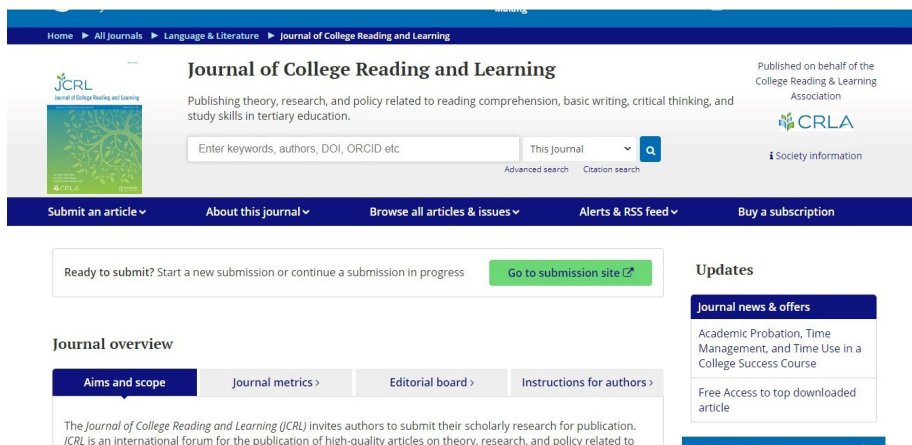


Figure 1 Journal of college reading and learning website (<https://www.tandfonline.com/>)

Four roles model

The notion of the four roles model (FRM) reader-viewer is an expansion of multimodal reading competence proposed by Freebody and Luke (2003). In the area of language pedagogy, the change from monomodal to multimodal texts has crucial implications for reading and the teaching of reading in the ELT context, triggering the need to conceptualize reading as a sociocultural and situated process and social practice across cultures, contexts, and social groups (Gee, 2008). In this respect, Serafini (2012b) proposed an extended reconceptualization of the resource model to four roles or social practices for reader viewing in multimodal texts.

Table 1
Four roles model for viewing multimodal text

The Role of Reader-Viewer	Competences
Navigator	To advance or engage in the realm of reading competence, encompassing skills such as decoding, understanding print concepts, recognizing directionality, and mastering sequencing (Whitaker, 1998).
Designer	To emphasize that readers of multimodal texts not only interpret the content and representation but also actively shape how the text is approached, the path of reading, the elements on which focus is directed, and, as a result, create a distinctive experience while engaging with the text (Spivey, 1997).
Interrogator	To reconceptualize reading as a social practice in which meaning is forged within a socially influenced environment, acknowledging the power dynamics within that context, and considering the reader's identity and the resources they have for engaging socially (Smagorinsky, 2001).
Interpreter	To engage in the act of creating or formulating meaningful interpretations and reactions to different texts and visuals (Goodman, 1996; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Serafini's study suggests that each role necessitates the reader-viewer to engage with multimodal texts from each respective perspective. This conceptual framework emphasizes the need for the reader to achieve multimodal reading competence, including coding, semantic, pragmatic, and critical competences (Freebody & Luke, 2003).

The FRM showcases a robust working multimodal text in ELT by addressing the diverse competencies required for multimodal literacy. Each role in the model highlights different aspects of reading that are essential for navigating, interpreting, designing, and critically engaging with multimodal texts. This approach ensures that learners develop comprehensive reading skills that are adaptable to the complex nature of contemporary texts.

Capturing students' experiences enacting the reader-viewer through narrative frames

Narratives, as accounts of personal experiences, form the essence of narrative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pavlenko, 2002). Polkinghorne (1995, citing Ricoeur) argues that "narratives are an especially suitable way to express human experiences" (p. 7). However, defining narrative research precisely is challenging. Lieblich et al. (1998) point out "the frequent and broad use of terms like narrative and narrative research in qualitative research" (p. 2). It is apparent that the two areas of focus—form and content—are not mutually exclusive but rather exist on a continuum; hence, examining narrative content inevitably involves

consideration of narrative form. In our research, we employed narrative frames as a data collection method to capture students' experiences in enacting the role of reader-viewer in academic reading class. According to Barkhuizen and Wette (2008), a narrative frame functions as a structural outline for a story, consisting of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of different lengths. The objective of the narrative frame is to facilitate the construction of a cohesive narrative by enabling individuals to fill these spaces with their personal experiences and reflections on them.

METHODOLOGY

Study design

Driven by qualitative approach, this study captured undergraduate students' life experiences engaging in academic reading courses in Indonesia's EFL teaching landscape. Narrative research involves exploring personal experience stories, which form the core of such research activities. Scholars have highlighted the significance of stories as a linguistic medium for expressing human experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pavlenko, 2002). Nonetheless, all forms of narrative research involve the use or analysis of narrative materials. These materials can be examined for both their form and construction, as well as their content. The distinction between focusing on narrative form and content needs to be clarified, as they are interconnected and lie along a continuum (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008). This study focuses on the form of the data collection instrument (i.e., narrative frames) and the content of students' stories after reading multimodal texts in academic reading courses. This report provides a narrative frame into how undergraduate students experience and understand the phenomena of multimodal reading practice, especially the reader-viewer in this digital era (Barkhuizen, 2014; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lee & Hong, 2022; Serafini, 2012b). In this respect, both teaching-learning experiences where the first author served as the reading instructor and the students' lived experiences as participants were empirical evidence of the possibility of journal websites as multimodal texts to promote academic reading activities such as understanding journal reputation, identifying parts of journal websites, and reading journal content.

Of the 30 undergraduate students in a cohort from a private university in West Java, Indonesia, five students were voluntarily recruited as participants in this study. Five students were recruited who were actively attending lectures and willing to participate in this study. Before the research commenced, the authors met with the five students, explained the research purpose and distributed informed consent form. The academic reading course was part of the language curriculum. The participants were asked to read the form carefully and sign it to ensure that the data would be kept confidential for research purposes. They agreed to sign the consent form as a legal document for participating in the study. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study. After the study briefing, five undergraduate students, Mawar, Bunga, Melati, Jasmine, and Rose (pseudonym, age, 19–20), agreed to participate in this study voluntarily. They were second-year university students who had studied English for six years at an intermediate level, and their language proficiency ranged from elementary to intermediate levels based on the TOEFL test (scores 400–450). All participants were competent in two languages: Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese. They were recruited for this research

because they regularly wrote narrative frames regarding their experiences while reading multimodal texts in an academic reading course.

Materials

This six-month academic reading course was designed to enhance students' skills in navigating, interpreting, designing, and critically analyzing journal websites. In this project, the participants chose five journal databases/websites, including:

1. <https://www.tandfonline.com/>
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/>
3. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>
4. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/publications/journals>
5. <https://journals.sagepub.com/>

The five journal databases offer millions of articles worldwide, providing high-quality articles. The profiles of each reputable database are as follows:

1. Tandfonline is an online platform for the Taylor & Francis Group, a leading academic publisher. It hosts thousands of journals covering various fields, including the humanities, social sciences, and behavioral sciences.
2. ScienceDirect is an online platform that offers access to a vast collection of scientific and technical research articles. It covers disciplines such as life, physical and health, and social sciences.
3. The Wiley Online Library is an online platform provided by John Wiley & Sons, a global publishing company. It provides access to a diverse range of journals, books, and reference works across multiple disciplines, including science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and the humanities.
4. Cambridge Core is an online platform for Cambridge University Press. It hosts academic journals and books covering a wide array of subjects, including science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and the humanities.
5. SAGE Journals is an online platform of SAGE Publications, a leading independent academic publisher. It offers access to hundreds of journals spanning the humanities, social sciences, behavioral sciences, and other disciplines. These platforms are valuable resources for researchers, academics, and students seeking access to high-quality literature and research findings.

These platforms are valuable resources for researchers, academics, and students seeking access to high-quality resources, particularly scholarly articles.

Procedure

Table 2 explains the stages of the participants' enactment of the four roles in reading multimodal texts. These stages enable students to provide instructions for exploring the journal website by navigating, designing, interrogating, and interpreting the information from the journal website.

Table 2
Research procedure

Stages	Participants Activity
Stage 1	In the first meeting, the authors asked the participants to navigate journal websites from various databases or Google. The purpose of this activity was not only to examine the participants' navigation skills but also to identify their digital literacy for academic reading courses. In this activity, the students needed to learn how to navigate journal articles from a reputable database. This helped the participants learn how to navigate reputable databases. The participants were asked to check the journal's reputation using https://www.scimagojr.com/ and https://mjl.clarivate.com/search -results databases, in which we clearly explained the steps for checking the journal rankings and country rankings.
Stage 2	After the participants had viewed the <i>journal, College Reading and Learning</i> , we asked them to interpret parts of the journal content, such as aims and scope, instructions for authors, society information, journal information, special issues, editorial board, related websites, and news offers.
Stage 3	This stage aimed to investigate participants' perspectives as designers. They were asked to read and understand how the journal website design was presented, from the header of the image and logo to its reading path, to construct meaning.
Stage 4	The participants were asked to read any details about the journal content, such as the aim and scope, structure of the article, and references. This activity aimed to explore the participants' roles as reader-viewers who interrogate. In summary, the activity of reading journal details and engaging with the content critically positions participants as interrogators, highlighting the interplay between the reader's identity and the power they wield in scholarly communication. This process underscores the active role of readers in shaping academic discourse through critical engagement and evaluation, reinforcing the idea that knowledge production is a collaborative and interrogative endeavor.

Data collection and data analysis

A narrative frame was adopted to explore undergraduate students' experiences while engaging with multimodal texts. Barkhuizen and Wette (2008) contend that a narrative frame is a story template consisting of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths. The narrative frame aims to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to the participants' experiences and reflections on these. For our research, we developed four templates (see Table 1), one tailored for each reader-viewer role after the participants read the journal's website. Each template comprised three or four sentence starters, thoughtfully organized to guide the narrative's progression, akin to shaping a storyline. Instructions accompanied these templates, prompting the participants to review all the sentence starters before initiating the writing process. This preliminary step was intended to provide a framework for constructing a coherent narrative, rather than generating three or four disjointed responses. The primary objective of these templates was to encourage undergraduate students to contemplate their academic reading, either broadly or in a more focused manner, within the context of the course they were currently engaged in. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis procedure described by Barkhuizen (2014). The students' narrative frames were analyzed as follows: Each student's written responses to three to five relevant starters (navigating, designing, interrogating, and interpreting) from a multimodal journal website were extracted from the whole story. There were 24 separate extracts, each entered into a row on a spreadsheet, with the sentence starter responses sequenced in separate columns.

The data were thoroughly analyzed using the qualitative content analysis methods outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1998). This analysis involved coding

and categorizing themes, identifying patterns within them, and interpreting the arrangements that emerged. This approach closely aligns with Polkinghorne’s (1995) paradigmatic analysis of narratives, which aims to uncover commonalities throughout the data. This study used narrative data relating to students’ experiences reading multimodal texts for illustrative purposes.

Table 3
Sentence starters of narrative frame

No	Roles	Sentence Starters
1	Reader as navigator	When I first read journal website... My experience enacted navigating and viewing reputable databases... I needed help... My experience navigating and viewing...
2	Reader as designer	When I was asked to navigate some journal articles... I felt confused as I assumed... Through this process... In my view...
3	Reader as interrogator	Before, I felt ... After a while... My experience in interrogating revealed that...
4	Reader as interpreter	At first, I had not realized that there was construction behind a text... I have witnessed that... For instance... Moreover...

RESULTS

In this section, we presented the data from narrative frame of five participants regarding their life experiences in academic reading courses. The following is a complete narrative from one participant, Mawar, using the narrative frames provided (sentence starters are in italics).

Reader-viewer experience as navigator

At first, the participant (Mawar) felt that navigating was a challenging but interesting activity because it enabled the participants to know reputable databases. Concerning this, Mawar reflected the following:

When I first read the journal’s website, I felt that I had a bit of a problem navigating the reputable databases of the journal’s website. There are many journal websites that I should visit. Then, my teacher educator guided me to navigate five reputable journal websites in the world such as Taylor and Francis, Science Direct, Wiley Online, Springer Link and Sage Journal.

My experience of navigating and viewing reputable databases was interesting, challenging, and insightful. These databases offer hundreds of journals and thousands of articles to expand academic literacy. (Mawar, narrative frame)

Drawing on the empirical data of navigating the journal website, the participant stated that it was a new experience because she had not previously familiarized herself with navigating journals from a reputable database. She mentioned that engaging with a journal website was a new skill for her. Although she initially felt overwhelmed by the number of journals, she was happy when the teacher educator guided her and other participants to navigate and focus on five reputable journal websites. She later enthusiastically navigated the complex and challenging journey to find information. Furthermore, concerning the two skills of navigating and viewing, she argued that although they were demanding, they were very worthy as they empowered her to explore many resources to support her academic reading. Mawar claimed that this process enabled her to become an autonomous learner, as she could find countless journal articles. The participants' voices in the navigation process suggest two practical implications for teaching EFL reading. First, teacher educators should habituate navigation skills so that students can explore the resources needed for their academic reading. Second, these skills can help teacher educators create meaningful activities to support students' multimodal reading competence. The findings correspond with Serafini's four-resources model (2012a), in that the term navigator incorporates several processes associated with reading proficiency, such as decoding, concepts of print, directionality, and sequencing.

Rose noted:

I needed help when exploring reputable international journal websites for the first time. The ScienceDirect, Cambridge, and Academic OUP databases were used. *My teacher-educator targeted* these journals.

Accessing and navigating reputable databases was a fascinating, motivating, and challenging experience. I can access hundreds of reputed journals to encourage my academic literacy. (Rose, Narrative frame)

Drawing on students' narrative frames, the teacher-educator had an exciting experience exploring reputable international journal websites such as ScienceDirect, Cambridge, and Academic oup.com. Initially, she needed assistance navigating these platforms; once she became familiar with them, the experience became fascinating and motivating. She could access a wide range of reputed journals, which encouraged and enhanced her academic literacy. Overall, her interactions with these databases have been a positive and enriching journey, expanding her access to valuable educational resources.

Reader-viewer experience as designer

Melati reflected that at first, Melati did not realize that a reading path to help her prioritize the information she wanted to navigate. She noted that:

When I was asked to navigate some journal articles, I had not imagined that there should be a reading path that I must follow. *I felt confused because I assumed* that I could do it randomly. Then, after my teacher educator informed me firstly I needed to identify the journal reputation and its rank by visiting <https://www.scimagojr.com/>, I found out a clue of what to do. The website provided further information such as

the country, subject and area, publication type, publisher, ISSN, and coverage and scope of the journal. This information helped me understand the journal's quality and reputation. In addition, I was guided to check the WoS. *Through this process*, I gained an understanding of the reading path and was able to design the information I should prioritize. *In my view*, the reader as a viewer assisted the order of information in journal articles in which I needed to understand the terms. (Melati, narrative frame)

The empirical data showed that the participants had yet to realize that navigating a journal should follow the specified reading path. Melati assumed she could do it unsystematically, later being informed of the information she found in chronological order in checking a journal's reputation. Before the teacher educator introduced proper guidance, Melati narrated that journal navigation should be managed according to the reading path (Serafini, 2012c). The participant in this context stated that after being informed by the teacher educator, she recognized that it was imperative to track down a journal's position. Furthermore, Jasmine added that she had not realized the need to conduct this. In her reflection, she mentioned two examples of journal navigation. The first was at <https://www.scimagojr.com/>.

She emphasized the importance of verifying the accuracy of a journal's bibliometric indicators, as this enables readers to ascertain the journal's impact factor and H-index. Another data database journal's reputation was confirmed by clicking the Web of Science (WoS). The results showed that there are two aspects involved in the role of the reader-viewer as a designer: organizing the information and reading path. The discourse of organization and reading path challenged Melati to identify the important information to be navigated, such as the construction of a journal website, understanding the graphics and symbols, and enacting a mind map of her reading path. This finding corresponds with Serafini (2012a), who argued that the concept of reader as designer can be extended from the producer of texts to the process of navigating and interpreting multimodal texts. Shifting from the designer as a producer of multimodal texts to a navigator and interpreter of texts requires an expansion of the concept of design to include the active construction of meaning potentials during readers' transactions with multimodal texts. For this reason, teacher educators should explore students' capacity to expand different modes and information on journal websites.

Rose said:

My lecturer asked me to navigate several journal articles, and I had not imagined that there should be reading steps involved. *I assumed* I could do it randomly; otherwise, it would be difficult after my teacher educator enlightened me to identify the reputable journal to surf the Scimago and country rank. I can further access website information such as country, subject areas and categories, publication type, publisher, ISSN, SJR, and H-index. *This information assisted me* in determining the quality and reputation of the journal. Furthermore, I was guided to select an open-access journal. *In my view*, the reader as a designer helped me understand the pathway of journal article information in which I need to understand the terms. (Rose, narrative frame)

From the student narrative frames, it is evident that after being instructed by her lecturer, the individual realized that there is a systematic approach to navigating journal articles, which she

had not considered before. Initially, she thought they could randomly access papers, but her teacher educator enlightened her about the importance of identifying reputable journals using tools like Scimago a country rank. She learned to gather valuable information about the journals, such as country, subject areas, publication type, publisher, ISSN, SJR, and H-index, which helped her determine the journal's quality and reputation. Additionally, she was guided to select open access journals. The experience of being a reader-viewer as a designer allowed her to understand the pathway too accessing journal article information, which involved learning new terms and concepts related to journal evaluation. This newfound understanding empowered her to navigate journal articles more effectively and make informed choices when selecting sources for academic work.

Reader-viewer as interrogator

The participants found difficulties at the beginning of the process, particularly in exploring the details of journal websites, such as journal coverage, scope, publication fees, and journal index. This can be seen in Bunga's statement.

Previously, I found it difficult when my teacher educator assigned me to examine the coverage of journal. I did not understand its meaning. Thus, I tried to read several times and interrogated the terms by intertextualizing them. After a while, I knew that the coverage included consideration of the relevancy of content, standards of presentation, regularity of publication, and publication ethics. By interrogating these, I also found that coverage was crucial for journal indexing, which required many requirements. Moreover, this role allowed me to determine whether the journal charged a fee.

My experience in interrogating text is valuable. Through my teacher educator's mentoring, I finally learned that reading is not only seeing surface text. I should think critically. Understanding the meaning of the text is important. My teacher educator explained that the reading process needs to consider cultural and social aspects. I think it is not easy because I am a novice reader, but my teacher educator welcomed discussions. It is a fruitful and useful activity since I am aware of the process and complexity of journal publication. (Bunga, narrative frame)

These narrative frames revealed that the participant, as a novice reader, experienced a challenging moment during the reading process. She said that reading entailed understanding the text and building critical thinking, such as grasping the meaning beyond the terms. Although she felt it was challenging to do critical reading for the first time, she felt energized. The participant admitted that she needed extra time to comprehend the terms in the journal website through the phrase "several times"; however, she was motivated to discuss the problem with her teacher-educator actively. The findings indicated that the concept of the interrogator includes the critical and sociocultural aspects of analysis espoused by Luke and Freebody in their original four resources model (Serafini, 2012b), which are important factors in reading multimodal texts. This implies that teacher educators should encourage students to be competent readers by engaging in critical reading skills and deploying knowledge of language and semiotic practices to identify how people, events, and ideas are portrayed in a text (Chan & Zhang, 2017).

Rose noted:

Previously, I encountered a problem when my teacher educator instructed me to determine the journal's coverage. Surprisingly, I did not know its meaning. Hence, I attempted to read the journal information by contextualizing and intertextualizing the terms. The coverage includes aims and scope, content, publication ethics, and submission information.

When interrogating the text, I learned that reading is not merely seeing the surface, but I ought to think critically via my teacher educator mentoring. It is vital to understand the meaning of a text. *My teacher educator helped me* scaffold the reading steps and consider cultural and social facets. I suppose it was challenging because I am a novice reader; however, my teacher was pleased to have warm discussions. This was an impactful activity since I passed the complexity of international journal publications. (Rose, narrative frame)

The individual encountered a challenge when their teacher educator asked them to determine the journal's coverage, as they were unfamiliar with the term. To address this, they read the journal information by relating it to the context and connecting it with other relevant information (intertextualizing). This means identifying and analyzing the connections between texts. In the context of journal websites, they understood that coverage included the aims and scope, content, publication ethics, and submission information. This experience of interrogating the text enchanted her because it highlighted the importance of critical thinking in reading. She learned that reading goes beyond merely skimming the surface and involves critical thinking and understanding the meaning-making process within the text. Her teacher educator was crucial in scaffolding the reading steps and considering cultural and social aspects, which made the task less daunting. She initially found it challenging as a novice reader, but warm and supportive discussions with their teacher educator had a significant impact. Through this mentoring, she successfully navigated the complexities of international journal publications. Overall, this experience enhanced their reading skills and the ability to engage with scholarly texts effectively.

Reader-viewer as interpreter

The participant explained that enacting reader-viewer as an interpreter enabled him to construct and generate viable meanings of journal websites. For example, Jasmine noted:

First, I did not realize that there was construction behind the text. When my teacher educator requested us to navigate the instructions for authors on a journal website, I finally understood the details of the authors' requirements before making a submission. Through the entire process, *I have witnessed that* by reading the journals, I constructed an understanding of how an article was produced, as well as the sociocultural meanings behind a text. *For instance*, when my teacher educator asked me to browse the instructions for authors on a journal website, it explained any details of the author requirements before making a submission. *Moreover*, it allowed me to explore my understanding of how to submit articles to reputable journals by registering in a ScholarOne manuscript. (Jasmine, narrative frame)

Drawing on this narrative frame, the participants had to explore any information provided on the website by comprehending, constructing, and interpreting the website. She expressed that interpretation was a challenging activity in which she had to respond to various modes of journal websites, such as author instructions and article submissions. This was a new experience for her because she needed to gain experience in submitting journal articles. However, it would be beneficial if she submitted the article someday. Even though the participant struggled with the multiple modes of journal websites and the design of elements, she had the motivation to keep reading to interpret. Following these findings, Serafini (2012b) argued that interpreting multimodal texts requires readers to develop interpretive repertoires that address visual images and design elements, the text itself, and the meaning potential across the various modes presented:

Rose said:

Initially, I did not realize that a text's formulation was behind a journal. I experienced and understood the journal homepage, which provided me with clear information about the author's instructions and how to submit it. It was a constructive experience for me, in terms of the process of how an article was produced, as well as the sociocultural facet. For example, my teacher educator directed me to browse the author's instructions and guidelines as part of the readership step. Therefore, it helped me easier to submit an article to a reputable journal by registering in a scholarly manuscript. (Rose, narrative frame)

Individuals must initially grasp the concept of a journal and its role in formulating a text. However, through the reader-viewer experience, she clearly understood the journal's homepage and how it provided essential information about the author's instructions and submission processes. This experience was constructive for, as she learned about the article production process and became aware of the sociocultural aspects involved in it. With the guidance of her teacher educator, she engaged in the readership step, which involved browsing the author's instructions and guidelines provided by the journal. By following these guidelines and understanding the submission process, individuals find it easier to submit articles to reputable journals. They can register and submit their scholarly manuscripts with greater confidence and competence. This experience as a reader-viewer-interpreter enabled her to navigate the intricacies of journal systems and actively participate in the scholarly publishing process in the following ways.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the authors summarize four essential points regarding the role of reader-viewer engagement with multimodal texts. First, from a knowledge perspective (Hickson, 2016), this study enacted readers as navigators. The participants discussed their experiences with navigating skills as a new skill that enabled them to find reputable databases and references. The participants expressed that before they knew this (navigate), they needed to learn how to obtain a reputable database of journal websites. From these students' accounts,

critical reflection on the concept of viewing and navigating skills enables students to move through space; in terms of hypertext, navigation includes movement through both cognitive and virtual spaces (Mills et al., 2025; Whitaker, 1998).

Second, the critical reflections of the reader-viewer as a designer enabled the participants to create their reading pathway (the route a reader takes through a text, influenced by its structure and design) and the mode of the journal website, in which the participants identified the crucial parts of the journal website. The participants stated that they had never noticed how to identify a journal's reputation. They continually searched Google for journal issues and discovered the journal's reputation when the teacher educator introduced scimagojr.com as the website for checking journal rank and reputation. This information can be useful for them before they read the journal article. However, the participants argued that they should organize and read the path to make sense and consider the context in which they are realized. Serafini (2012b) highlights that without a path, there is no potential for meaning because all meaning is constructed within discourse or other framing devices. In this study, the participants' paths marked the temporal and spatial locations. They also separated the text from the context in which it was read. The reader decides what is part of the text and what is part of the context to consider when reading it. The reader as a viewer and designer enables students to select from all the possible ways of positioning a text, the various designs, visual, and textual elements presented, and the sociocultural contexts of the act of reading, and decide how a particular text is to be read in a particular time and place (Kress, 2010). This finding reflects how the participants understood knowledge, power, and reflexivity when they enacted the reader-viewer as designers. Overall, the results reflect the concept of power in how the participants understand and enact their roles as reader-viewers and designers. By making interpretive choices, controlling narratives, gatekeeping knowledge, engaging reflexively, navigating intertextual relations, and influencing audience engagement, they demonstrate the multifaceted ways in which power is exercised and understood in the creative process.

Third, the concept of the reader-viewer as interrogator empowers participants to reconceptualize reading as a social practice and construct their reader identity in an academic context. For example, one participant argued that journal websites provide much information, such as coverage, publisher, indexing, and publication ethics, which should be read critically by novice readers. To understand, they should be critical readers by intertextualising the information.

Finally, the enacted reader-viewer as an interpreter enabled participants to engage in interpretation. For instance, the participants described the elements of the journal website and explored how articles were submitted, reviewed, edited, proofread, and published. They felt that publishing an article in a reputable journal required a long process, which seemed complicated because they were novices. The interpreting process of the journal website encouraged the participants' reader agency to make decisions and exercise autonomy (capacity for detachment, for example, construction of knowledge, critical reflection including understanding knowledge, power, and reflexivity of the reader-viewer as interpreter, ability to make decisions, and independent action).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrated the positive tone of the EFL reading journal website, which enables second-year undergraduate students to enact the reader-viewer as a navigator, interpreter, designer, and interrogator, all of which play an essential role in engaging with multimodal texts. Therefore, undergraduate students need to expand their reading practice by enacting the reader-viewer relationship in multimodal texts to develop multimodal reading competence. Teacher educators must become experienced readers of journal websites before they become competent instructors to support their students in achieving multimodal reading competence, such as coding, semantic, and critical competencies.

Additionally, the role of the reader-viewer as a navigator, designer, interrogator, and interpreter enables students to explore their critical reflection understanding of knowledge, power, and reflexivity while engaging with EFL teachers negotiating the identity of readers. Teacher educators can adopt this activity to engage students in reading the classroom. Although this study is limited to second-year undergraduate students, it contributes to the growing body of research on the advancement of multimodal texts in EFL reading teaching. Thus, future research should explore students' experiences reading multimodal texts in a larger context and investigate students' digital literacy as a new skill and practice in the EFL context.

Drawing on the limitations of the study, the authors emphasize that clarifying the overall timeframe of the study would help contextualize the learning process and the time required for participants to develop their navigation skills. The findings of this study can provide teachers with ideas for teaching academic reading using journal websites as multimodal texts in the EFL context. Further exploration of how participants interpret their experiences, considering their prior knowledge, educational background, and personal interests in EFL teaching, could deepen the analysis. In addition, connecting the narratives more effectively to broader theoretical frameworks or existing research on multimodal reading and academic literacy, such as Serafini's (2012a) four roles model, could strengthen the study's theoretical foundation. Finally, acknowledging and addressing potential biases, including the influence of teacher educators' guidance and the likelihood of positive reporting due to social desirability bias, would enhance the credibility of the study.

Declaration of AI use

We acknowledge the use of AI-assisted tools, including Paperpal, in refining several sentences and paragraphs in this article. However, these tools were only used to improve clarity, coherence, and the academic tone of the article. We declare that all ideas, interpretations, and conclusions remain the original work and responsibility of the authors involved.



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