

## **THE ESSENCE OF MULTILITERACY LEARNING AS A TREND OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

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### **Abstract**

Many changes which happen in our life are supposed to influence the change in our education system. Learning as the core of education process must be able to adapt with those changes to produce adaptive and competitive graduates in the future. In facing this condition, the concept of multiliteracy education and learning is a suitable concept to be developed since it applies language skills in establishing the four 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies; critical thinking, conceptual understanding, collaborative and creative thinking.

**Keywords: Multiliteracy Learning, Language Skills, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competence**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Some massive changes have been happened in our world in the last decades. The lifestyle, communication style, thinking style, and working pattern are some examples of the changes. In education field, these changes must not be ignored. In education, those changes are seen as opportunities and challenges to create better education program. It means education program which is relevant to the latest development and to the knowledge improvement. Therefore, the education offered nowadays is education program which is meant to develop people who can live the life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education orientation has been clearly implemented in the global scope. Many countries busy reconstructing their education system. Those reconstruction are conducted in micro up to macro scale; policies, curriculum, learning standard, assessing and evaluating process and pedagogical learning process. The final result of the reconstruction will lead to an education system that can be referred as multiliteracy education. Some efforts to develop multiliteracy education have brought many discoveries on the learning methods.

In the context of multiliteracy education and learning, learners learn in various contexts, using various media, through various learning methods, and under the principles of fairness, differentiation and multi intelligence concept. In this education system, learners' skills are developed so they can achieve multi competence. This multi competence is facilitated with multimodal representative means which can make learners free to develop their potential; applying their interest and talent, and enhancing their life capability.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **The Essence of Multiliteracy Education; Between Current Demands and Education Challenges**

In the beginning, the term literacy was defined as the ability to understand language symbols or literacy skill. In this definition, literacy was conceptualized into two main fields; beginner reading and writing. Based on the first scope, literacy was seen as the condition of being able to understand letters, words and meanings. The term literacy in language field is then developed through the addition of one more dimension of the most complete and the widest language which is from the first definition is seen as the unity of the most complete language, then now it is changed into everything that become the main discussion. The term literate discourse then starts to be used in many other fields outside language field. This is in line with the facts that discourse content and context does not only include language concept but also include various information from many different fields of knowledge. With the expansion of literate discourse concept, the term literate starts to be frequently used in other fields of knowledge which are integrated to the study of language. Based on this, literate then is seen as a tool that can be used

to communicate information. In line with new era development, this term is continued to advance depends on the field where it is used. For example in language field, the term reading literacy is defined as the ability to understand, use, and reflect texts through direct engagement to gain knowledge for achieving certain goals that is useful for an individual to participate in the community. In mathematics, this term is interpreted as the individual capability to formulate, build, and interpret mathematics in various contexts. In science, literacy means the ability to understand, think and apply science concepts and perspectives in various cases.

Although the term literacy develops depending on the fields of knowledge which define it, the first concept of literacy which is closely related to the language field is still more distinguished in those different fields. This can be seen in the concept of literacy which is existed in various fields of knowledge. In this case, communication is still highly correlated as a dimension of literacy. This fact shows that literacy skill cannot be separated from language field because language is the main mean of collecting and delivering knowledge. Based on this variety, literacy still considers language as the mean of knowledge and that is why the principles of language learning can be used as the mean of literacy learning in other fields of knowledge. This variety is also the reason that the term literacy across curriculum is used to refer to literacy as the mean of communication for the knowledge which must be communicated.

In its development, literacy which is used in different fields of knowledge uses various media as the mean of communication and meaning construction. This is in line with various beliefs that the critical attempts to understand information is not just narrowly done using language as the medium. Meanings are more understandable through the use of various communication media such as picture, video, movie, performance and other literacy media. The efforts to deliver information are also can be done through various media which make writing is not only limited on linguistic rules but also beyond the linguistic rules. This perspective then become the background of the term metalinguistic, multimodal texts, and finally ends at the concept of multiliteracy.

Baguley, Pullen, dan Short (2010) view multiliteracy as a way to understand more about literacy curriculum which is learned in formal schools which is require the students to productively participate in community. Conceptually, multiliteracy is a design that can be used to understand various text types and various media as the results of various new technologies. The understanding can be done through the pedagogy concept which gives chances for teacher to provide information for the students by using various texts and media.

Based on that concept, multiliteracy concept is developed based on the characteristics of multimodality across culture in the texts which are offered by digital communication media. This across culture aspect causes a change and reconstruction of meaning which is followed by the shift of culture. This contributes to the change of identity and practice of literacy from writing into visual literacy. Related to education, the use of various text types and media gives the chance for students to understand different and various meanings. Multimodal texts also encourage students to experience interpreting information in the global or local context.

Multiliteracy is also can be interpreted as the use of various media including printed media, audio or spatial media. In educational context, pedagogic role means developing pluralism epistemology which provides access so people do not have to erase or leave different subjectivity. Further, multiliteracy pedagogy focuses on the use of multimodal aspect on the students' classroom experience to engage students to the media and technology which they are already familiar with. In other words, multiliteracy enables students to use various technology media which they are familiar as their means of learning.

The development of multiliteracy concept in education cannot be separated from art based pedagogy concept, multi ways of knowing and multiple intelligences which have been proven to give value on increasing students' learning environment effectiveness. Related to this, multiliteracy is also believed to develop students' advance creativity which is an important skill

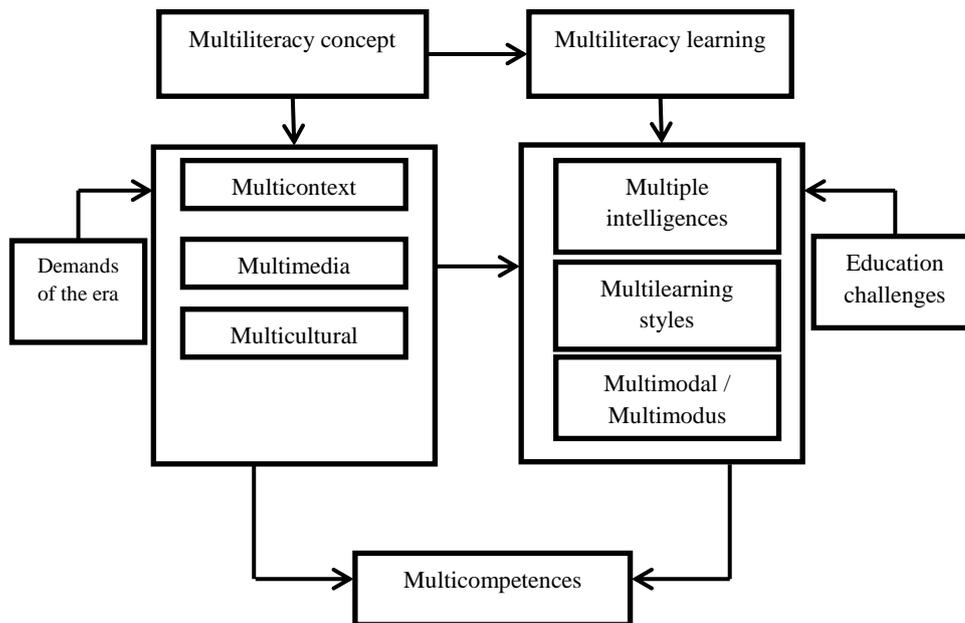
for them. Multiliteracy education is also believed to help students understand different social culture and the importance of communication and technology mastery and development. Multiliteracy aims to make literacy practice in school is same with the literacy practice happens at home and in informal environment. In this perspective, multiliteracy is a learning approach which is developed based on the awareness and acknowledgement of the students' cultural variety and complexity and also students' various learning styles. Thus, multiliteracy education is believed to help students' to learn and work in this 21<sup>st</sup> century,

The New London Group (2005) stated that multiliteracy pedagogy is built from four components or knowledge process; practical situation, systematic learning, critical framework and practical transformation. Further, Cope and Kalantzis (2005) stated that these four components is a unity which strengthens each other. Practical situation enable teacher to understand students' socio cultural background and to provide learning activities which are important for students' identity development. Systematic learning provided by the teacher is a model, explanation, and theory which help the students build concept and in-depth understanding. Critical framework is used as media to help the students to have the ability to work innovatively and to perform tasks. These practices are closely related to teachers' and students' critical thinking and the usefulness of the tasks which require creativity.

Based on those for pedagogy components of multiliteracy, it can be explained further that when the practical situation is correlated to the scaffolding learning concept through systematic learning, it will become a useful media to develop critical and analytical thinking skill. Systematic learning should be on the activity based learning concept which enable students to learn based on the stages of their learning development and learning styles. Moreover, when critical framework is correlated to the practical transformative, this will shape practical reflection and become practical based critics rather than ideology based critics which is more abstract. In line with this, Cope and Kalantzis (2005) stated that multiliteracy pedagogy provides an effective and efficient learning experience.

Agreed to the perspective of Cope and Kalantzis (2005), Iyer and Luke (2010) stated that students who learn through multiliteracy will have deeper understanding. This understanding is the result of proactive learning that the students have been done. Based on Iyer and Luke (2010), proactive learning is learning which is developed based on the learning principles of; experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing and applying. The principles means that students learn through activities which combine students' background knowledge and new knowledge they learn through meaningful learning. Conceptualization means the abstract concept and theory are synthesized through the process of embedding and theorizing. This will help students to define, applying concept, and visual representing. Analyzing means that learning is developed through the activities of analyzing, interpreting the function of skills through the understanding of knowledge roles, and the criticize using the analysis purpose that has been specified before. Applying means that the knowledge was creating through the understanding of appropriate situation. Through the study of the situation, knowledge is applied and expanded so it will result as new knowledge.

Cope and Kalantzis (2005) also stated that the use of multiliteracy term is based on two arguments which are closely related to the culture, educational institution and global demands. This first reason why this term is used is that in communicating information, various media can be used, the second reason is that this term has important meaning in enhancing the pivotal meaning of language and culture for the development of individual capability. Hence, multiliteracy education has various focus of language usage which will be highly depend on the field of knowledge studied, the affecting cultural context and the social effect result.



**Figure 2.1**  
**Basic Design of Multiliteracy dan Multiliteracy Learning**

Based on some theories about multiliteracy, through the figure above the writer tries to summarize the concept of multiliteracy and its implication for multiliteracy learning. Based on the figure above, multiliteracy is related to multi-contexts, multimedia and multicultural. Multiliteracy is considered as multi-contexts because this skill is not only related to one of contexts, but also to various contexts including situational context and knowledge context. Situational context means that the texts learned are not only refer to one field of knowledge but also refer to various field of knowledge. Thus, multiliteracy context is across field of knowledge and across curriculum.

Multiliteracy is also related to multimedia. This means that literacy is learned not only using one of media but also using various media. The media used include confessional up to digital media. This concept is in line with the fact that information can be presented not only in the form of text but also in the form of visual such as performance, music, drama and through the use of technology and many other communication media. Based on this, literacy media is multiformat, multicreation and multifunction.

Further, multiliteracy is also related to multicultural. This concept is consistent with the concept of critical literacy which views a text as something cultureless. A text is constructed and affected by the writer’s position on the partucular cultural dimension. Other aspects which usually affect a text are the background of writer such as ethnic, religion, race, educational background, faith, political view and philosophy concept the writer follows. Related to these conditions, multiliteracy is the real concept of critical literacy and as the realization of critical pedagogy in education.

In line with the concept of multiliteracy above, literacy learning is the larning process which is developed based on the basic components of multiliteracy. Literacy learning is developed based on the students’ ability including intelligence, learning style or learning model. From multi intelligences view, multiliteracy learning is learning process which utilizes students’ various intelligences. For example in learning the science concept, teacher can utilize spatial and

musical intelligences to the students so the students can acquire the intelligences to make them easier to understand the science concept they learn.

In presenting their understanding, students can also use multimodal or multimodal texts. Those texts are texts which are not limited by words, but can be in the form of pictures, visual, performance; music or technology based digital texts. Though the use of multimodal texts, students is not only required to present their understanding in written language but also to use other forms of literacy. These various ways in presenting the understating are believed to help students master and develop process, concept and knowledge attitude they learn.

With the use of multimodal texts and students’ multiple intelligences, multiliteracy learning is conducted by not only considering multi learning styles the students have, but also how to use those learning styles. On the other hand, students who have one learning style will learn well since their learning style can be optimally used to learn various contexts, process, and knowledge. Hence, visual, spatial, kinesthetic, auditory, imaginative and other type of learning styles can be used as the main media to achieve success in literacy learning.

Consistent with the concept of multiliteracy and multiliteracy learning above, multiliteracy and its learning aim at multicompetence. Through multiliteracy learning, the students are expected to master not just one competence but various competences including knowledge competence, thinking competence, attitude competence and character competence. These facts show that multiliteracy and multiliteracy learning are very useful for preparing the students so they can life their life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is based on the facts that multiliteracy and multiliteracy learning aim to help students to be ready in various aspects in living their life in school, workplace and in society. Multiliteracy and multiliteracy learning are clear portrait of our life, therefore when the students have mastered these, they will be ready in facing the real life. Thus, it is natural that there are many experts view multiliteracy as an important concept in 21<sup>st</sup> century educational context.

Multiliteracy concept as an important concept in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education is supported by Morocco, et.al. (2008:5) who stated that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most important competence must be mastered is 21<sup>st</sup> century competences. Learning and living competences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by four important things; conceptual understanding competence, critical thinking competence, collaborative and communicative competence, and creative thinking competence. In their view, these competences are based on and facilitated by multiliteracy skill.

Specifically, it can be explained that understanding competence is a competence which is related to someone’s ability to understand various knowledge. This understanding of knowledge must also be specified into the understanding of a certain field of knowledge someone interested in. in line with this fact, some efforts are needed to develop someone’s understanding in a certain field of knowledge he must master.

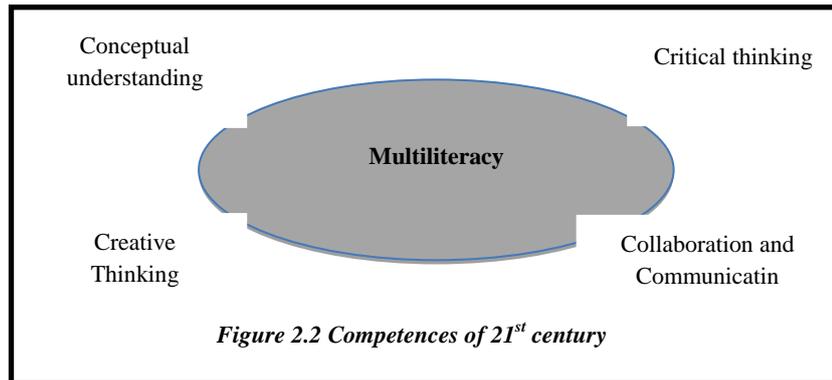
The competence of critical thinking means using thinking ability and reasoning ability to criticize various phenomena in the surrounding. This critical thinking ability is usually started by someone’s sensitivity of anything and then it is followed with the ability to evaluate that thing based on his point of view. Through this critical thinking ability, someone will be able to put himself appropriately in any situation and he will have the ability to change any situation which is unfavorable into favorable situation for him.

Collaborative and communicative competence is the ability which is related to the willingness to cooperate and interact with others. This ability is an important skill to be mastered to synergy with others and to show someone’s existence in front of others around. Through the mastery of this competence, someone will be able to deliver various critics to others and to communicate knowledge to others so he will become a worthy person in his environment.

Creative thinking competence is related to the willingness on producing ideas, process and products which have higher value, unique, and innovative. The willingness to produce creative

ideas is believed to open opportunities for someone who does it to have a job, living, and better life. Further creative competence will enhance someone's value so some opportunities will come for him to fulfill his needs.

Based on the explanation above Morocco, et.al. (2008:9) showed the relationship of the four competences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as visualized in the figure below. Based on the figure, multiliteracy is the center of competences which supports the development and the use of other four competences. Related to this, multiliteracy is the most needed competence that must be mastered in order to develop the other four competences which are needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Related to the figure above, Morocco, et.al. (2008:7) stated further that multiliteracy skills which need to be mastered to support and develop the four competences of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are advanced reading skill, good writing skill to build and express meaning, accountable speaking skill, and the skill to master various digital media. These four competences show that literacy mastery cannot be separated from the concept of literacy in dimension of language competence.

Furthermore, competence that must be mastered to build multiliteracy competence is advanced reading understanding since reading is one of the ways to master knowledge. In addition, this competence is highly correlated to the ability to absorb knowledge from abundant information from various sources. Hence, the person who has this competence will understand the information precisely which later will contribute to his rich knowledge. The importance of reading competence is further explained by Concannon-Gibney dan McCarthy (2012) by stating that, “...all students be provided with the problem-solving, communication and thinking skills that they will need to be affective workers and citizens in the 21st century. Reading plays a key role in science achievement.”

Writing skill to build and express meaning as one of multiliteracy competences is the skill to produce creative critical thinking of the knowledge has been mastered. Writing to build meaning means that writing activity done is not only functioned as the mean to deliver other's ideas but also as the mean to deliver students' ideas so the understanding a certain knowledge will be developed. Through this writing activity, the students will have the ability to communicate their ideas to others so their communication and cooperative skills will be enhanced.

Accountable speaking skill as one of the multiliteracy competences can be defined as the ability to produce oral ideas which is meaningful and can deliver it in an appropriate way. This skill is useful for many purposes including delivering ideas, persuading others or entertaining others. Accountable speaking skill is the characteristic of having sufficient knowledge, creative and critical thinking, and also as the characteristic of advanced and mature communication ability which is useful for many purposes. The skills supporting the fourth multiliteracy competence is the mastery of digital media. This ability is correlated to the willingness to master various digital media which are highly developed and have become the daily needs in our life. Through digital media, information can be presented in the fast and accurate manner. Hence to master

that information, students must be able to master the technology. On the other hand, the use of digital media enables various effects on the society. Thus, through the mastery of digital media, it is expected that the bad effects of the digital media can be anticipated and the good effects can be used properly.

The four skills which support multiliteracy competence are language skills which are functioned as the tools to master various fields of knowledge and not just to master language knowledge only. Anything understood from reading which is defined and expressed through writing and communicated through speaking can be any knowledge outside language field. The fact that multiliteracy competence is the main competence which is used to support and develop other four competences shows that language literacy concept can be used as the framework in different fields of knowledge. Related to this, the term literacy support is formed and can be seen as equal to the term multiliteracy learning. Morocco, et al. (2008) stated that literacy support is learning framework which can be used to guide students in learning in the classroom. Literacy support is also curriculum framework which can be used to create new strict and relevant unit in every lesson or to change and enrich the existing unit to give more space for the 21<sup>st</sup> century competences.

This framework provides various learning strategies which can help students achieve various in-depth understanding about the important ideas and concepts in every lesson. Learning strategy which focuses on the use of multiliteracy concept as the tool and intellectual technique enables students to access, process, and communicate important ideas or information while enriches students' inquiry skill. In other words, multiliteracy based learning is very useful in creating critical inquiry based learning environment as well as in developing the use of multiliteracy competences.

McConachi, et al. (2010) give discipliner to the term literacy to picture multiliteracy learning. Based on his opinion, literacy learning discipliner is learning which emphasizes the use of reading, logic, resrach, speaking and writing to learn and build complex understanding of knowledge content which is related to certain fields of knowledge. Based on this, multiliteracy learning always uses language skills as the tools to do critical inquiry activities and as the means to build knowledge. This is in line with Ivanic (2009) opinion which stated that multiliteracy learning is the learning which gives challenges for students to understand and apply practical literacy which is functioned as the media to learn various concepts across curriculum. The concept of multiliteracy learning is also stated by other experts McKee and Ogle (2005). McKee and Ogle (2005) define multiliteracy learning that it has to be seen as the skill to apply raeding, writing, listening and speaking competences efficiently. This is to enhance the thinking and communication ability. Further, this definition is expanded with the ability to criticize analysis and evaluate information from different sources from various fields of knowledge, and the ability to communicate the information.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the discussion above, multiliteracy learning can be defined as the learning which optimizes multiliteracy skills to create better learning environment. This learning is mainly for the development and the use of the four competences of the 21<sup>st</sup> century including critical thinking competence, conceptual understanding competence, collaborative and communicative competence, and creative thinking competence. Skills needed to support those four competences are reading, writing, speaking and information and communication media mastery skill.

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