CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive description of the study. It consists of a background of the study, formulation of the problem, operational definitions, the aim of the study, and significance of the study.

A.   Background of the Study

In contemporary education, the ability to critically interpret and analyze semiotic elements has become an essential skill, particularly as visual media continues to dominate modes of communication. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their role in meaning-making, originated from the works of Saussure and Peirce (1950). While Saussure emphasized the dyadic relationship between the signifier (form) and the signified (concept), Peirce proposed a triadic model involving the sign, its object, and the interpretant. These foundational theories have informed a wide range of applications, including the interpretation of educational materials such as posters, which rely heavily on symbolic and visual communication to convey information.

In educational settings, posters serve as semiotic tools designed not only to inform but also to persuade and engage learners. These materials often employ various semiotic resources such as color, layout, imagery, typography, and symbolic representations to communicate messages efficiently to a broad audience. According to Chandler (2007), understanding semiotics is crucial in unpacking how visual elements function beyond their literal appearance, especially in materials aimed at education, health awareness, and public service.

Over the past two decades, scholars such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Bateman (2014) have contributed significantly to the field of multimodal discourse analysis, particularly through the development of frameworks for reading visual design. Kress and van Leeuwen's *Grammar of Visual Design* outlines how visual elements communicate meaning through representational, interactive, and compositional structures. Similarly, Bateman (2014) emphasizes the interplay between textual and visual modes in posters and other semiotic artifacts. These

frameworks provide robust tools for analysing visual texts, offering detailed accounts of how elements like salience, framing, and layout contribute to meaning-making. However, the application of these theories in real-world learning contexts remains limited. Many of the existing studies focus on theoretical models rather than investigating how students engage with visual semiotic texts in practice. For example, recent research done by Burdujan's (2024) analysis focuses on the structural quality of digital posters rather than examining how students interpret them. The study does not address the challenges learners may face when decoding multimodal elements, which leaves a gap that researcher aims to explore. Burdujan's (2024) work remains conceptual, providing no empirical data on how learners interact with or potentially misinterpret digital posters. Since the study does not investigate learner difficulties, there is a need for research that examines students' challenges directly, which this study fulfills as It leaves an empty gap on how students from diverse cultural backgrounds interpret localized materials such as educational posters used in Indonesia.

Recent empirical studies have begun to address this gap. A study by Prameswari et al. (2023, p. 1202–1212.) in Indonesia and Malaysia found that many students and teachers "did not know much about the images presented," suggesting a limited ability to interpret visual semiotic meaning beyond literal features. Similarly, Rezeki and Sagala (2023), in their analysis of elementary school English textbooks, observed that students often rely on obvious visual cues like colors or simple symbols, but struggle to identify implicit meanings when visuals include more culturally embedded or symbolic components. These challenges are more pronounced when cultural or symbolic elements are less familiar or not explained in class. These findings align with other work (e.g., Astari and Pratolo, 2025) indicating that although English textbooks include multicultural values visually, the representation is often one-dimensional or lacks depth; students and teachers may not notice subtle cultural or symbolic references

The issue of cultural interpretation becomes even more critical when examining the application of semiotic theories that were largely developed in Western contexts. For instance, the semiotic frameworks of Kress and van Leeuwen

(2006) are rooted in a Western understanding of visual communication, which assumes certain cultural conventions shared by the target audience. Indonesian educational posters often integrate culturally embedded visual elements such as batik motifs and Islamic iconography that carry meanings specific to Indonesian contexts rather than the Western conventions assumed in models like Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) (Krisnawati, 2019). This cultural gap can result in confusion for students, who may not have been exposed to these cultural symbols in their formal education. As Lim (2021) suggests, multimodal pedagogies must be adapted to reflect the sociocultural realities of learners in diverse contexts, particularly when those contexts differ significantly from the ones in which the semiotic models were originally developed.

This study seeks to respond to these challenges by investigating the specific difficulties that Indonesian students face in analysing the semiotic elements of educational posters. It aims to identify the challenges students face when analysing educational posters that use both images and text, examine how effectively students apply semiotic theories particularly the framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen to decode visual meanings. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the pedagogical practices of teaching semiotic analysis. By highlighting the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, this research aims to offer insights into how educators can better support students in developing visual literacy. Moreover, by examining students' challenges, the study will offer valuable information on the most common misconceptions or difficulties that students face, providing a foundation for educational interventions. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of culturally responsive teaching tools and analytical frameworks that are adaptable to local contexts. As visual communication is often culturally specific, the ability to recognize and interpret the symbols used in educational materials is crucial. This adaptation to the cultural and social context of students is key to the success of teaching semiotic analysis, and is an essential consideration for educational design in multicultural settings. By doing so, this study not only enriches the field of semiotic research but also provides practical implications for enhancing visual communication skills in educational

settings. In particular, the research seeks to investigate the students' challenges in analysing semiotic images of educational posters.

B.   Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background above, the researcher addressed the following question, "What challenges do students face in analysing semiotic images of educational posters?"

C.   Operational Definitions

a. Educational Poster	:	refers to a printed or digital visual medium designed to communicate instructional or informative messages in an academic setting used by participants for learning material
b. Images	:	refer to the visual components contained in educational posters that convey meaning through composition, symbols, color, and layout.
c. Semiotics	:	Refers to the study of text and images, particularly how meaning is constructed through visual and textual elements.

D.   Aim of the Study

This study aims to investigate the challenges students face when analyzing semiotics images of educational posters and the solutions they use to overcome these challenges.

E.   Significance of the study

a. Theoretical Significance

This research provides theoretical benefits to support any academic studies that involve Visual Social Semiotic analysis.

b. Practical Significance

This Research can be used for educators as references and reinforcement for future researchers in using Visual Social Semiotic as references in teaching and/or researching literature.

c. Empirical Significance

The researcher used this research paper as a medium to learn, explore, and analyze

much more about students' problems in analysing educational posters and how they overcome those challenges in analysing semiotic images of educational posters.