A NEEDS ANALYSIS
IN DEVELOPING A WRITING CURRICULUM FOR EFL EDUCATION STUDENTS:
A CASE STUDY AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION
OF SEMARANG STATE UNIVERSITY

Puji Astuti
Semarang State University

Abstract

This study was intended to evaluate an existing writing curriculum in an English education program. The curriculum evaluation was conducted through a needs analysis, focusing on the needs of the students in the program. It is hoped that the result of the study would provide useful information for the program about writing curriculum they are implementing. There were four aspects of the curriculum that this study investigated: (1) the goals/objectives of the writing courses, (2) the approaches/methodology, (3) the classroom management, and (4) the class/program resources. More specifically, this study intended to know whether the course objectives/goals were appropriate with the needs of the students, whether the approaches/methodology were contextual and met the needs of the students, whether the classroom management was effective, and whether the class/program resources adequate to implement the goals/objectives. The study was categorized as a case study since it was a certain case happened in a certain context. The same case may not happen to other contexts that have different characteristics to the context of this study. The study employed qualitative/descriptive design by utilizing four methods of data collection: (1) document analysis, (2) classroom observations, (3) questionnaire, and 4) interview. The analysis of the data was conducted throughout the study; once a piece of data was gained, it was analyzed right away. The data was coded and categorized which then allowed for generating findings. There are four major findings of this study: (1) the goal/objectives of the writing courses were appropriate to the students' needs; however, the courses did not accommodate the realization of the goals/objectives, (2) the approaches/methodology, to some degree, were not contextual and did not meet the needs of the students, (3) the classroom management, to some extent, was not effective, and (4) the class/program resources, for certain aspects, were adequate to implement the goals/objectives of the courses.

Key Words: curriculum, needs analysis, approach, method, classroom management

INTRODUCTION

In the context of language teaching and learning, curriculum has to do with syllabus design, language teaching methodology, assessment and evaluation. Curriculum evaluation is essential in any language program because it focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language program in order to understand how the program works, and how successfully it works, enabling different kinds of decisions to be made about the program, such as whether the program responds to learners' needs, whether further teacher training is required for teachers working in the program, or whether students are learning sufficiently from it (Richards, 2001:286). One way to do curriculum evaluation is by conducting needs analysis.

Richards (1984) in Nunan (1998:43) states three main purposes of needs analysis: it provides a means of obtaining wider input into the content, design and implementation of a

language program; it can be used in developing goals, objectives and content; and it can provide data for reviewing and evaluating an existing program. Needs analysis conducted in this study, hopefully, could provide the basis for the evaluation of an existing writing curriculum, provide the basis for planning goals and objectives for a future curriculum, can help with the selection of appropriate teaching methods in the curriculum, and may provide the basis for developing syllabus and teaching materials for the writing courses.

Needs analysis is strongly recommended by Nunan (2001:51), because a sound educational program should be based on an analysis of learners' needs. Writing as one of skills taught in EFL instruction in Indonesia is considered difficult to teach and learn. In some settings, writing instruction is not handled professionally. Many writing instructors only focus on mastery of grammar and writing theories, not on practice writing. Alwasilah and Alwasilah (2006:47) claim such practice as one of the mistakes of Indonesian education system. Therefore, it is imperative that education program that prepares EFL teachers handle writing instruction professionally. Conducting needs analysis could be one of the many efforts to make it real. Alwasilah (2001:26) suggests that profession-oriented writing program should certainly be based on a needs analysis.

Needs analysis conducted in this study dealt with four aspects of writing curriculum in the research site. The four aspects are: 1) goals/objectives, 2) approaches/methodology, 3) classroom management, and 4) class/program resources. The four aspects are considered essential to be evaluated as they go together in one direction in the implementation of the curriculum.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs descriptive and qualitative design as it reveals some aspects of an implemented writing curriculum in an English education program. They are: goals/objectives, approaches and methods, classroom management, and class/program resources. Those aspects were investigated and evaluated through a needs analysis conducted by doing classroom observation, administering questionnaire, conducting interviews, and analyzing documents. The four procedures were employed as the methods of data collection. The result of the needs analysis, hopefully, could be inputs for future development of the existing writing curriculum. As it was a certain case happened in a certain subject or context; the same case may not happen to other subject or context. Therefore, the study is categorized as a case study.

Qualitative study focuses on specific situations or people and it emphasis on words rather than numbers (Maxwell, 1996:17). Yin (1994:1) argues that case study is the research strategy when the focus of the study is contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context and one has little control over events. This is in line with what Merriam (1988:20) points out about case study, that it is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group. Case study is also descriptive in the sense that the end product is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study. Descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation (rather than prediction based on cause and effect) are sought, when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for

study (Merriam, 1988:7). In addition, Merriam states that the aim of descriptive research is to examine and present a detail account of events or phenomena. Case study researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. This study has the characteristics of descriptive and qualitative case study.

An initial study was conducted prior to major study. It was intended to introduce myself to the people in the research site, to study the situation and the people, to know what sort of writing curriculum they applied, what they did in their writing courses, what they believed as important for the courses, what they expected from the courses, their views on the courses, etc. Most importantly, the initial study helped me sharpen

the focus of the research—the research questions. Maxwell (1996:44) points out that initial studies or pilot studies could generate an understanding of the concepts and theories held by the people the researcher is studying.

There were three stages that I went through in the initial study: I observed two writing courses of the four level writing courses in the program, I interviewed the lecturer of the two writing courses and two students from each course, and I did document analysis throughout the study. Data gathered from the initial study were analyzed, interpreted, and concluded. The result of the initial study provided valuable inputs for conducting the major study. The following figure shows the stages of the initial study:
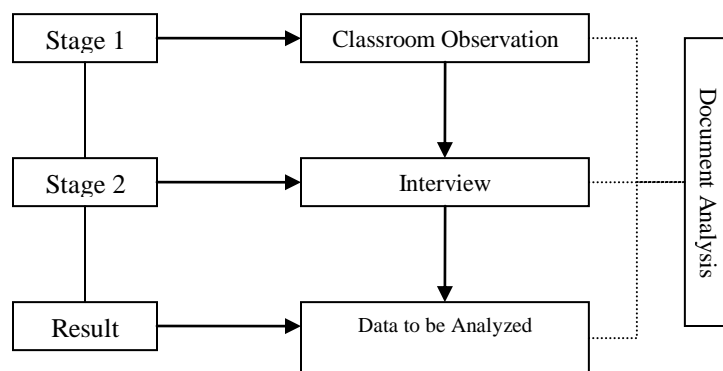

Figure 1 Stages of Initial Study

In the major study; firstly I did classroom observation in the other two writing courses. Secondly, I administered questionnaire to three writing lecturers and the students of the two writing courses. Thirdly, I interviewed two writing lecturers and two students from each writing

course. As in the initial study, document analysis was conducted throughout the study. The data resulted from the major study were then analyzed. The stages of the major study are represented in the following figure:
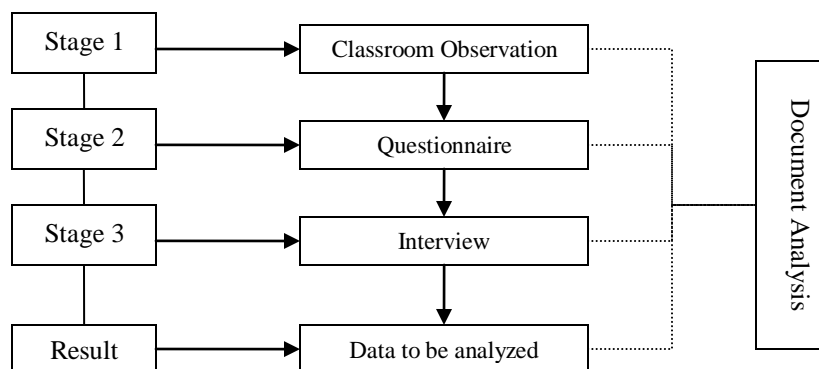
```
┌──────────┐        ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Stage 1  │───────▶│ Classroom Observation│ ┄┄┄┄┄┐
└────┬─────┘        └──────────┬──────────┘       ┆
     │                         ▼                   ┆     ┌──────────┐
┌────┴─────┐        ┌─────────────────────┐        ┆     │          │
│ Stage 2  │───────▶│   Questionnaire     │ ┄┄┄┄┄┤     │ Document │
└────┬─────┘        └──────────┬──────────┘       ┆     │ Analysis │
     │                         ▼                   ┆     │          │
┌────┴─────┐        ┌─────────────────────┐        ┆     │          │
│ Stage 3  │───────▶│     Interview       │ ┄┄┄┄┄┤     └──────────┘
└────┬─────┘        └──────────┬──────────┘       ┆
     │                         ▼                   ┆
┌────┴─────┐        ┌─────────────────────┐        ┆
│  Result  │───────▶│  Data to be analyzed│ ┄┄┄┄┄┘
└──────────┘        └─────────────────────┘
```

Figure 2   Stages of Major Study

Research Site

The study was conducted at English department of Faculty of Arts and Languages of Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) or Semarang State University, from May 2005 up to May 2006. The department has two programs, namely English education and English literature. The focus of the study was the writing curriculum of the English Education program. However, during the initial study, I got a chance to observe a class of English Literature students taking Sentence-Based Writing course (SBW), the first level of four-level writing courses. From the observation, it could be stated that both English education and English literature program applied the same writing curriculum. The following is the objective of each writing course in the department:

Table 1 The Four Writing Courses and their Objectives

Level	Name of Course	Semester	Course Objectives
1	SBW	2	Students will develop their writing skill in producing well-organized sentences with various English sentence patterns which show their lexicogrammatical potentials and their proper use of punctuation and writing mechanics.
2	PBW	3	At the end of the term the students will produce well-organized paragraph by employing certain rhetorical strategies, cohesive devices, and other features of written language, covering simple genres that show their mastery in using their lexicogrammatical potentials and correct use of writing mechanics.
3	GBW	4	At the end of the course, students are expected • To know the various genres of writing: *Spoof, Recount, Report, Analytical Exposition, News Items,*

			Anecdote, Narrative, Procedure, Description, Hortatory Exposition, Explanation, Discussion, Review, and Commentary.
			• To have a capability to write compositions based on the genres.
			• To have a capacity of analyzing the social functions, generic/schematic structures, significant lexico-grammatical features.
4	AW	5	At the end of the course, students are expected to have theoretical bases on writing scientific/academic essay and to be able to write some good pieces of scientific/academic writing.

Before going through the four courses, first semester students in the program should pass a course namely Intensive Course (IC). It is an 18-credit course in which students are equipped with basic skills of English. The goal of the course is to make students ready to attend the next courses in the program (as stated in the IC text books, written by a team consisting of UNNES lecturers, published in 2002). After taking a close look at the books, I could say that IC is an integrated skills course because in one unit, students are to learn: 1) expressions, 2) sentence pattern, 3) reading, 4) writing, and do 5) beyond practice. For the writing section, the books mention that the purpose is to train students so that they could write English expressions with good handwriting, grammar and punctuation. Activities students have to do in writing section, for example, rewriting alphabets and simple sentences.

There are three books used in IC, namely Book 1, Book 2, Book 3, and Listening Practice Book. Regarding the objective of IC, one lecturer respondent argued that after going through IC, students would be, to a certain degree, homogeneous in terms of language proficiency and ready to attend the next courses in the department. A student respondent, however, thought that IC writing section did not give her opportunity to do real writing--writing her own sentences, as she was just asked to do rewriting activities. In other words, the writing section in IC did not give students experience of doing actual process of writing.

Respondents

There were two categories of population in the initial study: 1) two lecturers of Sentence-Based Writing course (SBW) and one lecturer of Genre-Based Writing course (GBW) and 2) SBW and GBW students. The initial study was conducted from May 19 to July 20, 2005. At that period, the SBW students were in the second semester and the PBW students were in the fourth semester. The major study was conducted from November 15, 2005 to May 30, 2006. There were also two categories of population in the major study: 1) one lecturer of Paragraph-Based Writing course (PBW) and two lecturers of Academic Writing course (AW), 2) PBW and AW students, they were in their third and fifth semester respectively. It is necessary to highlight that student respondents in the initial study were the same as student respondents in the major

study. They were students of English education program.

The observation that I conducted in the initial study involved two groups of SBW students; one of English Education program (31 students) and one of English Literature program (33 students), and 39 students in the GBW course. For the interview, I chose two students from each course who I thought to be critical and outstanding in their class; they were active in class discussion and were informative and cooperative. I also interviewed the lecturer of the two courses. An opportunity came when a lecturer who taught SBW in English Literature program offered me to observe his class and to interview him. I took the opportunity and it gave me an understanding that there was no difference in writing curriculum applied in English education and English literature program.

There was no difference in terms of number of students or respondents in the major study. After the observation done, questionnaires were administered to all students of the two courses and their lecturers. There were three lecturers involved, one PBW lecturer and two AW lecturers—one senior lecturer and his assistant. The interview was conducted involving two students form each course. However, I chose different students to be interviewed but with the same rationale of selection as I had in the preliminary study. The lecturer of each course was interviewed except the AW senior lecturer due to time constraint.

THE FINDINGS

Referring to categories of writing curriculum proposed by Reid (1993: 74-76), the writing curriculum that became the focus of the present study could be categorized as combination curriculum. It was a combination of language-based curriculum and pattern-model based curriculum. The first course, Sentence-Based Writing (SBW) course, reflects language based curriculum as it aims at students' grammatical accuracy and correctness. The next two courses, Paragraph-Based Writing (PBW) and Genre-Based Writing (GBW), reflect pattern-model based curriculum because it focus on functional and situational writing, and on the expectations of the audiences for that writing. The goals emphasize the forms for writing, including thesis sentences and rhetorical modes such as narrative, the comparison/contrast paragraph, or the expository essay. Seeing from its objectives, the highest level of the four-level writing course, Academic Writing (AW) course, actually had the characteristics of process-based curriculum; focusing on students' fluency in writing. Regrettably, in its practice, the course laid emphasis on students' mastery of academic writing conventions.

The purpose of the needs analysis conducted in the present study was to collect information from the students whether the four aspects of the existing writing curriculum: (1) goals/ objectives, (2) methodology, (3) classroom management, and (4) class/program resources, are appropriate to their needs as student writers. The following is the presentation of the findings:

The Goals/Objectives of the Writing Courses

It could be stated that the overall objective/goal of the four writing courses-- to enable student writers to write with proper use of academic writing conventions, and the objectives of each writing course, were appropriate to the students' needs. However, the four courses failed to accommodate the realization of the goal and the objectives because of two main reasons: the four courses put more emphasis on students' mastery of grammar and writing theories and hardly gave the students experience of doing

actual process of writing in which they went through writing processes.

In the intensive course (IC) writing section and the SBW course, most of the time the students dealt with exercises of sentence structure and grammar. It is true that students in those levels still learn patterns and structures of English. However, the program should take what O'Donnell (1963:26-27) stated in Silva and Matsuda (2001:32) into consideration:

While knowledge of grammatical structures may be an important factor, writing is a complex process and involves more than the manipulation and recognition of basic elements; it seems likely that the awareness of basic structures is essential to written composition, but it is obvious that such awareness is not always accompanied by proficiency in writing.

In PBW and GBW course, the lecturers approached the writing instruction with what Hobelman and Wiriachitra in Krall (1995:122) name as traditional "read-analyze-write" approach: student is given an example paragraph to read; the overall organizational pattern of the paragraph is explicated; finally, student is told to write a similar paragraph about a different subject. Further, Hobelman and Wiriachitra argue that the traditional approach is deficient in two important respects. First, the teacher views the student's writing as a product. She assumes that the student knows how to write and uses what the student produces as a test of that ability. Second, the teacher focuses on form, i.e., syntax, grammar, mechanics, and organization, rather than on content. The content is seen mainly as a vehicle for the correct expression of the grammatical and organizational patterns taught, and the correct choice of vocabulary,

After passing the three previous writing courses, to some extent, AW students are those who have adequate proficiency to communicate in written form. Unfortunately, the lecturer respondents in this study hardly viewed it as the right moment to assist their students in their writing processes. Instead, they used almost all of the course time to explain conventions of academic writing. The students, as a matter of fact, needed to do actual processes of academic writing. The stated objectives of the AW courses were essentially in line with the students needs. Nevertheless, the course failed to accommodate the realization of the objectives.

The Approaches/Methodology

The approach and method of teaching and learning employed in the four courses were not contextual and did not meet the students' needs because of some reasons: (1) teaching method mainly applied in the four courses was lecturing, this teaching method made the students bored with their writing course, (2) the needs of most of the students to do collaborative writing in their writing class was not accommodated, (3) the four courses employed product approach to teaching writing while process approach to teaching writing was more suitable to the students' needs, (4) sufficient feedbacks on the students' writing assignments were not given, and (5) the four courses hardly connected reading and writing as the agenda of class session or as part of assignments during the course. Both groups of student respondents came up with four aspects they considered essential in a writing course, namely: group/class discussion, sample writing, collaborative writing, and feedback.

The syllabus of each the writing course, as a matter of fact, says that there are many strategies to be applied in the classroom, the strategies include writing activities such as group and class discussion, editing, peer collaboration, conferencing, etc. Nevertheless, classroom

observation data revealed that all the lecturer respondents mainly applied lecturing in their teaching writing.

Learning from the above depiction, it is then recommended that the writing courses in the program employ writing workshop in each class session. Components of writing workshop that would suit the needs of the students in this study may include the followings.

Mini lesson or discussion on course materials in cooperative learning setting. This could be conducted at the beginning or at the end of class session. Through cooperative learning, the discussion would take place effectively. The lecturer at this stage serves as a resource person. He or she could also offer something to the class that is meant to inspire and instruct or introduce a writing strategy.

Work time (writing and conferring). At this stage, student writers start a new piece of writing or go on to the next writing process/continue their piece of writing/write their ongoing project. Lecturer moves among individuals, conferring with them.

Peer conferring and/or response group (collaborative writing). Students work in group and do peer correction and conference; read and response to work in progress. Lecturer mainly plays the role of resource person at this stage.

Share session. Individuals read share their writing processes or share sample writings, ones they think the class could learn from. Through the activity mentioned latter, student writers learn writing through reading. Lecturer supports the process by becoming feedback provider.

Finished-work celebration. Student writers come together to celebrate their finished works; in the form of portfolio or anthology of students' papers or others. At this very stage, the lecturer congratulates the students for their finished

works, gives general feedback on their learning writing, encourages them to keep on writing, etc.

The Classroom Management

There are five aspects of classroom management that become the focus of the study: (1) students' opportunity to articulate their voices, (2) course description and outline/syllabus, (3) number of writing assignment, (4) roles of writing lecturer, and (5) encouragement. It could be claimed that classroom management in the four writing courses was, to some degree, not effective based on some considerations as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Both groups of student respondents got the opportunity to articulate their voices regarding their writing, their needs as student writers, the lecturer's teaching performance, and regarding the course in general. Even though the students were aware of the benefits of taking such opportunity, they hardly ever took it. It was mostly because many of them felt not comfortable and not brave enough to do so. Most students in the first group were afraid that what they tell to the lecturer would affect their score. Meanwhile, the second group of students thought that the lecturer(s) already had fixed plans for the course. Therefore, they felt like they did not have to give any inputs. This group of students was also of the opinion that the lecturers' authority was high. Thus, they decided to just follow the course as it was. All in all, it could be claimed that the opportunity given for both groups of students to articulate their voices was not effective. Such opportunity could be fruitful for the two parties— students and their lecturer, if the lecturer informs the students in the first place that whatever they articulate would not influence their score. Questionnaire, as opposed to casual question and answer session, could be an alternative way of knowing students' voices—needs, as it could

lesson students' fear to say what they want to say.

Regarding course description and outline/syllabus, both groups of students were aware of its functions in their learning. However, they did not get the handout of the syllabus. Their lecturers just informed some aspects of the course at the beginning of the course. What the lecturers did was an ineffective way of giving course information to students; the students might not know how far they were going, what assignment to do next, what to read next, etc. Students deserve to have syllabus of the course they attend at hand.

The first group of students admitted that writing assignments they had to do in their SBW and PBW course were too many. They found it boring and tiring. The second group of students experienced the same thing in their GBW course. Meanwhile, in their AW course, this group of students did not get any academic writing assignment. Assignment they frequently had to do was answering questions about academic writing conventions. On the whole, the assignments in the four courses were not effective. As the key component in a writing course, assignment should allow student writers learn writing through the act of writing or reading. The assignments should have a main goal, i.e. developing students' writing skills. Consequently, the number of writing assignment should not be too many so that students could go through writing processes with necessary feedback both from peers and lecturer during the semester.

Students in both groups argued that a writing lecturer should play many roles, most importantly the role as motivator, resource person, and feedback provider. Unfortunately, their writing lecturers mostly played one role, presenter of course material It could be stated that the role that the lecturers played in the course was different from the students' idea of roles of writing lecturer.

Regarding encouragement to keep on practicing writing, even though it was not given on regular basis, students in the two groups admitted that they got it from their lecturer. Generally, the students needed such encouragement because they thought that writing is not an easy task for them. For that reason, it is recommended that writing teacher or lecturer provide continuous encouragement for his or her student writers during the course.

The Class/Program Resources

Based on the students' voice, the class/program resources in the department were adequate to implement the goals/objectives of the writing curriculum, in terms of number of credit, number of meeting, written sources, and classroom size. In terms of outside class opportunity; however, the writing lecturers in the present study failed to provide.

When the respondents in this study were asked to describe an ideal writing classroom, they stated that it is one that is clean, comfortable, and spacious. Moreover, the room should have good lighting. The student respondents argued that in a good writing classroom, each student writer gets adequate assistance from the lecturer. The respondents also mentioned that the program should add some other facilities to complete those available in their writing class; the program should provide LCD, reference books, internet access, stationeries, scrap papers, and dictionaries.

Regarding number of students in their writing class, the majority of the respondents stated that it was too big. They proposed that it should be 20, so that each student writer could get necessary feedback and assistance in their learning writing.

Recommendation for Further Study

Needs analysis conducted in this study was intended to help improve an existing writing curriculum. As mentioned in the previous part, the needs analysis concerned with the needs of student writers in the research site. It was because students are the key participant in any curriculum development. Nevertheless, it would also be very fruitful to concern with the needs of the instructor, to know their teaching beliefs, ideas, their difficulties in teaching writing, etc.

Many of writing teachers/lecturers were equipped during their college years with principles of teaching writing. When they are in the field, however, they might face problematical circumstances but those principles could not help cure or they face circumstances where all those principles are hard or even impossible to implement. Researching writing teachers/ lecturers would also help improve the quality of writing instruction.

REFERENCES

Alwasilah, A. Ch. 2001. *Language, Culture, and Education: A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia.* Bandung: Andira.

Alwasilah, A. Ch. 2003. *Pokoknya Kualitatif: Dasar-Dasar Merancang dan Melakukan Penelitian Kualitatif.* Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.

Alwasilah, A. Ch. and S.S. Alwasilah. 2005. *Pokoknya Menulis: Cara Baru Menulis Dengan Metoda Kolaborasi.* Bandung: PT Kiblat Buku Utama.

Belcher, D.D. and G. Braine. (ed.). 1995. *Academic Writing in a Second Language: Essays on Research and Pedagogy.* New Jersey: Ablex Publishing

Corporation.

Brown, H. D. 2001. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy.* New York: Pearson Education Company.

Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.). 2001. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Ferris, D. and J.S. Hedgcock. 1998. *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Hadley, A.O. 2001. *Teaching Language in Context.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Kessler, C. (ed.). 1992. *Cooperative Language Learning: A teacher's Resource Book.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Kranhke, K. 1987. *Approaches to Syllabus Design for Foreign Language Teaching.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. Inc.

Merriam, S.B. 1991. *Case Study Research in Education.* California: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Maxwell, J.A. 1996. *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach.* California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Nunan, D. 1998. *The Learner-Centred Curriculum.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reid, J.M. 1993. *Teaching ESL Writing.* New Jersey: Regents/Prentice Hall.

Richards, J.C. 2001. *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J.C., J. Platt, and H. Platt. 1992. *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics.* London: Longman.

Richards, J.C. and W.A. Renandya. 2002. *Methodology in Language Teaching: An Anthology of Current Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Silva, T.J. and P.K. Matsuda (ed). 2001. *Landmark Essays on ESL Writing*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Stern, H.H. 1983. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching.* London: Oxford University Press.

Sundayana, W. 2003. Pengembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Berbasis Kompetensi. In *Revitalisasi Pendidikan Bahasa: Mengungkap Tabir Bahasa demi Peningkatan SDM yang Kompetitif,* ed. Alwasilah, A. Chaedar & Abdullah, Hobir, 31-61. Bandung: Andira.

Yin, R.K. 1994. *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*. California: Sage Publication, Inc.