IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION OF DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS BY USING PICTURES AND SEMANTIC MAPPING AT GRADE VII.1 OF SMPN 2 X KOTO DIATAS SOLOK REGENCY

Nurmailis Muis, Zainil, Desmawati Radjab
English Education Section of Language Education Program
Graduate Program of State University of Padang

Abstrak: *Artikel ini ditulis berdasarkan hasil penelitian tindakan kelas yang bertujuan untuk (1) mengukur sejauhmana penggunaan gambar dan peta semantik membantu siswa kelas VII.1 SMPN 2 X Koto diatas dalam memahami teks deskriptif dan (2) menemukan faktor-faktor yang ikut mempengaruhi peningkatan pemahaman tersebut. Data penelitian ini yang berbentuk kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui tes pilihan ganda dirata-rata dan dibandingkan dengan KKM (kriteria ketuntasan minimum). Sedangkan kualitatif data yang dihasilkan dari kegiatan observasi, catatan lapangan dan wawancara di analisis dengan menggunakan prosedur kualitatif data PTK (penelitian tindakan kelas). Hasil kedua data ini dibandingkan dan dihubungkan untuk menjelaskan temuan dari penelitian ini. Dari penerapan teknik ini ditemukan bahwa pemahaman membaca siswa meningkat dari 41,5 pada tes awal, menjadi 84,5 pada siklus pertama dan meningkat menjadi 86,14 pada siklus kedua. Adapun faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi peningkatan tersebut berupa materi, teknik, media, manajemen kelas, strategi guru dan pendekatan guru yang digunakan.*

Key words: *students' reading comprehension, descriptive text, pictures and semantic mapping*

Introduction

Teaching English genres become one issue for Indonesia's curriculum now a day. From Junior High School until college or university, the students have been required to comprehend at least twelve genre texts, where the descriptive text is as the first. The descriptive text has been taught in the grade VII of Junior High School (see Depdiknas, 2003: 17). Like other genres, the descriptive text has its own specification that is different from others. As the case, the students have an ability to identify the characteristics.

Descriptive text is a kind of genre text that contains describing about people, place or thing. According to Matthews (1997: 94) descriptive text is "a way to explain about events in or states of the world". Schwegler (2010: 351) adds that descriptive text is "a text used to expose the details about places, people, qualities, emotions, moods, etc". So, descriptive text is a text that describes the details of events or something.

The descriptive text is built from two generic structures. Pardiyono (2007: 33) writes that descriptive text begins with the identification and description. In the first part of the text, the writer identifies the object that will be explained. Generally, the text is started by stating the object that is the focus explanation of the text's content. Next, the text describes the

object. The details of the text allow the reader understanding the information to make the sense of the object in his mind.

On the other hand, the descriptive text also has the social function differed from other genres. According to Kramsch (1998: 63) the social function of the genres is based on the name of the text itself. So, the descriptive text aims at describing the details of something (Depdiknas, 2003: 76). It means that if the text is explained about 'My house', the text has a social function 'to describe the details of my house'.

Dealing with the components of the descriptive text above, the writer found that the students faced the problem to identify them. It was indicated by the result of the preliminary test observation at grade VII.1 of SMPN 2 X Koto Diatas Solok Regency, only 32% students who got the grade above the minimum standard criteria achievement (then known as KKM) where the KKM was 60. When the teacher tried to do the preliminary observation, it was found that the students were lazy to read and hard to figure out the descriptive text since the text was not completed with the

pictures. Sometimes several books that were used in the learning and teaching process were no title. It was difficult for them to know the content of the text. Several students tried to translate the text into Bahasa Indonesia in order to understand the meaning of the text. Unfortunately, most of the words in the dictionary did not match with the context of the text. That was the reason, the students cheated when they had to finish the exercises or homework since the technique was not successful to assist them to comprehend the text.

To solve the problem above, the teacher wanted to share to the students a collaborative technique (pictures and semantic mapping) that was hoped to be a

good way not only to understand the meaning of the context of the text but also assisted them to find the correct translation of the words that they found in the descriptive text.

To avoid the ambiguous meanings of what the pictures and the semantic mapping are, there are several definitions from several experts. Kemp, et al. (1994: 217) state "pictures that are slide models which are colorful, realistic reproductions of original subjects, may contain verbal, graphic, and photographic and may fill information of the text". Smaldinho, et al (2007: 251) write that "pictures can be viewed as photographic representations of people, places and things". Wales (2011) adds that "pictures or images can be shown as paintings, drawings or photographs about something that is taken in a flat surface". In this research, the pictures are a media that is used in the classroom that may be taken as pictures, images or photos that are taken in a flat surface.

Hendrick (1994: 371) states that pictures in reading process help students to make a link from the language to the printed material. Pictures that are used in a reading text do not explain the text completely, but they can be used to motivate the reader since the pictures can give general information of the text (Smaldino et al, 2007: 251). In addition, pictures entertain the readers to read the text, because when the readers see the pictures, it makes them have desire to know what the 'real' meaning of the pictures or what the pictures may tell about. Jensen (1998: 95) adds that the patterns in pictures and context in the written material give a significant effect to the reader, where the reader understands the meaning of the text easily. It is why the picture is an alternative media used in teaching and learning reading comprehension.

Semantic mapping is a way to draw the linking ideas that have a core topic in the center. Actually, several experts have

their own definition about the semantic mapping. According to Mikulecky (1990: 41) "semantic mapping is an association model that is shown the relation between the words about the text's meaning". The semantic mapping, according to McWhorter (1992: 307) is "a model of visual outlines that draw the relationship of all ideas from a text or a message. So, the semantic mapping can be drawn as many things that are correlated each other that can be shown from the lines in the model of the semantic mapping.

In reading a text, the students can be helped to activate their background knowledge and the reading concepts by using semantic mapping. The use of semantic mapping has several purposes: Brown (2001: 308) states the semantic mapping helps students to overwhelm the long ideas and the events in the written text become easy to understand since the semantic mapping facilitates the students to make it short. In the same idea, Estes (1999) agrees that semantic mapping aims at allowing students to arrange their ideas and knowledge based on what they read or study. So, the semantic mapping can be a technique for the students in understanding what they read, because they do not need to translate all English words to their mother tongue.

The use of pictures and semantic mapping as a collaborative technique gives many advantages (McWhorter, 1992: 307 and Brown, 2001: 308). First, the pictures can be a tool to the students to imagine what the text will tell about. Second, the semantic mapping can be mapped the text well in order to help the students to understand about the meaning of the words and also the context of the text. third, the use of pictures and semantic mapping is as a good collaboration where the pictures help to assist the students to make the semantic mapping.

Using pictures and semantic mapping in this research is applied as a mixing technique to help students to comprehend the descriptive text. So, the pictures and the semantic mapping are used as a combination that is not separated each other. The pictures of the text will be used firstly before the students make the semantic mapping based on the pictures. They will read the text to clarify their semantic mapping. The process will be done by the students to activate their background knowledge and link it to the text that they will read.

The procedures for the pictures and the semantic mapping that are used in this research are adopted from Zaid's (1995) model that is suited with the needs; presenting the topic or title, Brainstorming by using pictures, categorizing the ideas that comes from the brainstorming process, personalizing the map, and post assignment synthesis to find the best map.

The procedures (based on Curriculum Depdiknas 2003) used to assist the students to figure out the indicators of reading comprehension of descriptive text are as follows:

a. identifying the generic structures

The generic structures of the descriptive text consist of identification and description. Generally, the identification is taken in the first paragraph. The function of the identification is to introduce to the reader about the phenomenon that will be described its details in the next sentences or paragraphs that are known as description.

b. Identifying the social function

The social function of descriptive text is to describe the details about something, such as thing, people, place, universe, etc.

c. Identifying the main idea and supporting ideas

The main idea is a core idea where the topic is concluded in it. This main idea will be explained more details in the supporting ideas. It means that the supporting ideas fulfill much information related to the topic in the main idea.

d. Identifying the vocabularies' meaning

    The vocabularies' meaning consists of synonym and antonym of the vocabularies that are available in the text. The synonym is the same meaning of the specific word. For example, the word *start* is as same as *begin*. On the contrary, the antonym of a word has an opposite meaning from another word. For example, the word *start* has opposite meaning with *finish*.

e. Identifying factual information

    Factual information is the all information that are general knowledge or specific one from the text. In fact, the factual information in descriptive text is the all details about the phenomenon. It may be as the characteristics, location, qualities, etc. about the phenomenon that is told in the topic.

    This paper explains the result of a classroom action research in 'improving students' reading comprehension of descriptive text by using pictures and semantic mapping at grade VII.1of SMPN 2 X koto diatas solok regency'. The research has two research questions; 1) to what extend can pictures and semantic mapping improve students' reading comprehension at grade VII.1 in Junior High School 2 X Koto Diatas Solok Regency? 2) what factors influence the changes of students' reading comprehension by using pictures and semantic mapping? It is hopefully that this study would give the research's significant theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the use of pictures and semantic mapping can be a source to get new information about the description of using pictures and semantic mapping as a collaborative technique in reading activity. Practically, it gives a direction how to use the pictures and the semantic mapping as a collaborative technique in teaching and learning process.

Method

This research was held in the classroom action model from February 23rd – March 19th 2011 into two cycles in order to improve about 22 students' reading comprehension at grade VII.1 of SMPN 2 X Koto Diatas Solok Regency. The classroom was chosen since the result of the preliminary test was low in reading test.

There were quantitative and qualitative data to measure the validity of the research. The quantitative data was collected by reading test in a multiple choice model and counted by using mean formula (Sudjiono, 2006: 81), then the result was compared with the KKM. On the other hand, the qualitative data was found by using several instruments like observation, field notes and interviews and analyzed by some procedures from Yasin (2010: 66-67). In collecting the data, the researcher was helped by a collaborator who was also an English teacher. She conducted to fill the observation sheets and make a note during the research.

In controlling the two cycles, the researcher did four procedures (see: spiral model by Kemmis and McTaggart 1988: p.11). Every cycle consists of four meetings. The activities (based on Curriculum Depdiknas 2003) in every meeting can be explained as follows:

1. Plan
    a. Designing several lesson plans to teach the reading skills especially for descriptive text.
    b. Collecting descriptive texts based on the themes for grade VII Junior High School.
    c. Seting up the questions that were answered by the students based on the texts.
    d. Creating and finding out the pictures related to the genre text.
    e. Building up the semantic mapping according to the descriptive texts
    f. Preparing research's instruments such as observation checklist, students' attendance lists, etc.

g. Asking for another English teacher as a collaborator and the head master's permission to do the research.

h. Informing the students about the research's aims and purposes, share the rules and how it was done in their class.

2. Action

In action activities, the teacher implemented the lesson that had been designed in the planning activities. The teacher taught the class based on the lesson plan that was prepared before. The technique was held in this step. Action in the classroom is to apply the use of pictures and semantic mapping to the students to improve their reading descriptive comprehension. The steps (based on Curriculum Depdiknas 2003) in the action were like bellow:

a. Greeting the students to start the class.

b. Showing the title and the pictures about the text

c. Asking to predict about the text's content based on the pictures

d. Guiding to make a semantic mapping based on the prediction

e. Asking to read the text to checking the semantic mapping

f. Asking to make the correct one and give the questions about the reading comprehension.

3. Observation

Observation activity in every cycle was done by the observer and her collaborator. The observation aims at monitoring all students and the teacher in teaching and learning process. So, for each meeting, the collaborator viewed and checked all students' and the teacher's activities. To help the collaborator to do the monitoring, she was given the observation's checklists that contains of reading comprehension indicators, picture and semantic mapping's procedures, and steps of the lesson plan. In the observation process, she also did field notes about the activities in the classroom.

4. Reflection

After the researcher finished the action stage, she and the collaborator followed a reflection stage. In this stage, they reviewed all activities that had been occurred in the classroom in order to confirm the lesson plan. Then, at the end of the cycle, they evaluated the students' reading comprehension by giving them test to measure how deep they understood the text. The students' marks from the test were scored to get the mean. The results of the measurement were checked by using the minimum standard criteria achievement (KKM) that had been determined before (it was about 60).
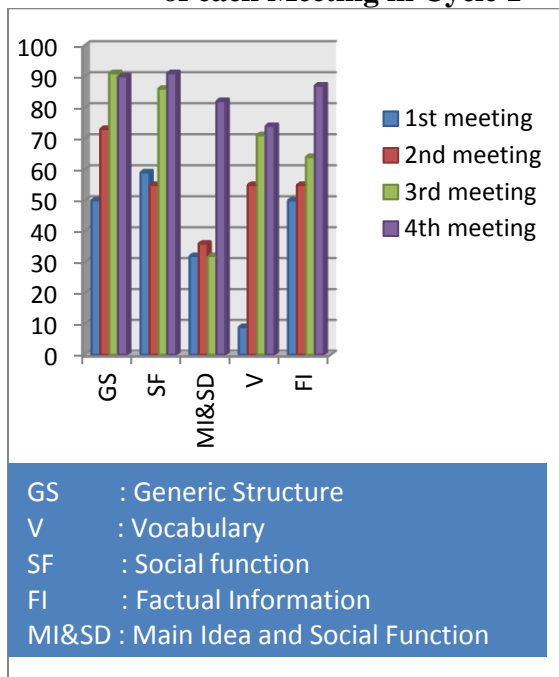
A. Result and Discussion

The research that was held in two cycles were taken from February 23rd – March 19th 2011, began by doing the three meetings for the teaching and learning process and the end of each meetings the researcher did the test dealing with their improvement for the day. The researcher also did the test in the each cycle that was followed in each fourth meeting.

In teaching and learning process, the researchers began the class by greeting the students, checked the attendances and gave motivation. In the whilst activities, she showed pictures about the reading text and asked the students some questions to brainstorm. Then she guided the students to guess what the text about. She wrote the students' ideas in the
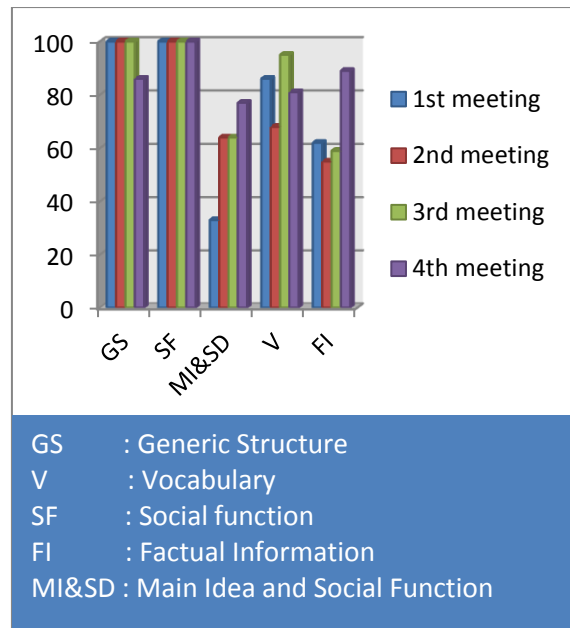
white board and asked the students to read the text in order to make a semantic mapping in group. In the end of the process, the researcher concluded the lesson and tested the students by using the reading test. The result of the students' reading test after using the pictures and semantic mapping in the first cycle like bellow:

Diagram 1. The Mean Score of Reading Descriptive Comprehension Indicators of each Meeting in Cycle 1

GS　　　: Generic Structure
V　　　: Vocabulary
SF　　　: Social function
FI　　　: Factual Information
MI&SD : Main Idea and Social Function

Based on the diagram above, we can see that the students were able to answer the reading test in almost all indicators well. Unfortunately, the result in understanding the main idea and supporting details, and the vocabulary mastery was still unsatisfying. The researcher tried to fix the problems in the second cycle. The researcher tried to use some colorful cards about the ideas in the text in order to make the students easy to remember the words. After finishing the second cycle, the researcher did the test where the result of the students' test in the second cycle can be seen in the diagram bellow:

Diagram 2. The Mean Score of Reading Descriptive Comprehension Indicators of each Meeting in Cycle 2

GS　　　: Generic Structure
V　　　: Vocabulary
SF　　　: Social function
FI　　　: Factual Information
MI&SD : Main Idea and Social Function

From the diagram, the students had improved in understanding the reading descriptive text. However, the best scores were for generic structures and social function of the descriptive text, the other indicators was above the KKM scores. The successful of the using pictures and semantic mapping in improving the students reading test also can be compared like bellow:

Diagram 3. The Mean Score of Reading Descriptive Comprehension of Preliminary Test and Two Cycles
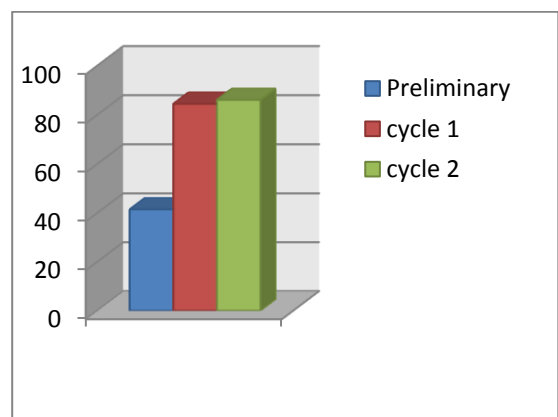
According to the diagram above, generally the students' comprehension about descriptive text was improved significantly from the preliminary test to the cycle 2's examination. The students' average scores

were improved from 41.5% in the preliminary test to 84.5% in the cycle 1 and to 86.14% in the cycle 2. It means that the use of pictures and semantic mapping to improve the students' reading comprehension in descriptive text was successful.

The explanation above shows the scores that were got from the result of the students' scores through the use the pictures and semantic mapping to comprehend the descriptive reading text. Besides that, there are other factors that influenced the improvement of the students' understanding. They can be seen from the table bellow:

Table 1. The result of the observation and interview (Qualitative Data)

No	Qualitative Data		Result
	Observation and Field Notes	**Interview**	
	The teacher's Activities	**The Students' Activities**		
1	She selected the material based on the syllabus	Most of the students could understand the material	They agreed that the material was easy to be understand	The material
2	She used the picture and the semantic mapping as a technique in teaching reading of descriptive text	The students were facilitated comprehending the text by showing the picture and made the semantic mapping	Most of the students felt that the technique really help them to understand the text especially dealing with the generic structure	The teacher's technique
3	The teacher managed the classroom by dividing the students into several small groups since the students in a class were only about 22 students.	The students could consentrate to finish their tasks in the group in order to make a semantic mapping	Almost 95% students were able to finish the duty easily in the group. They agreed that the group assist them to comprehend the text and the felt enjoy to follow the teaching and learning activities.	The classroom management
4	She picked the colourfull pictures and cards.	The students were interested to the media by guessing about the pictures and active in the discussion.	They loved the pictures and felt that the pictures assisted them to understand the material.	The media
5	The teacher showed the pictures to guide the students to make the semantic mapping and to understand the text.	The students were guided by using the pictures and semantic mapping.	Most of the students were assisted to know and predict the content of the text.	The teacher's strategy
6	She allowed the students to discuss with the teacher and the other	The students were learning in a good controlled. They could be more discipline	They agreed that the teacher's approach helped them to be active in learning and be more	The teacher's approach

	friends in the group and also gave appreciation and punishment for the discipline.	then before.	discipline.	

Based on the table above, there are about six factors that influenced the students' success in understanding the descriptive text. First, the material was chosen was suitable with the students' level. Dealing with this factor, the teacher should be considered to the curriculum for Junior High School. Brown (2001: 314) states that the reading materials should be suitable with the students' level where the tacher teaches. It means that the materials have to get appropriate standard from the government. Harmer (1998: 273) also agrees that the good reading material is not only interesting but also can be a good model for writing aspects, give a good chance to students to open a discussion, know about new topics and as a tool to study the language itself.

Second, the technique that was as a mixing between pictures and semantic mapping that was really facilitated them to understand about the descriptive text. As the same opinion, Wulyani (2007: 263) states that semantic mapping and pictures, the both are used to teach the new vocabulary that is important for the students in understanding the descriptive text.

Third, the media that was used in colorful things stimulated them to be active in the teaching and learning process. Brown (2001: 192) states that media is also as one thing that attracts the reader to know what the text about. The fourth factor is the classroom management that helped them to work together with their friends in group discussion. Horn (2008: 54) agrees that the students' group can be assisted one by one and all the students in the group can interact each others. Murawski and Dieker (2004:57) adds that the group discussion not only facilitates the students to comprehend the texts but also in finishing their tasks.

Fifth, the teacher's strategy facilitated them to understand about the text by showing the pictures firstly before they begun to make a map and read the text. And the sixth, the teacher's approach also affected to the students to motivate them to do their duties. To build a good atmosphere in teaching and learning reading, the teacher has to aware to the students conditions. Marlowe and Page (1998:37) propose that the teacher has to assist the students in a discipline attitude. He can give good instructions and several rules that have to be obeyed by the students. Moore (2005: 384) chooses the humor to approach the students in order to facilitate the students in good conditions. He believes that the humor can make the students relax and always ready to study and finish their duties.

Conclusion

1. The use of pictures and semantic mapping better improve the students' understanding of reading descriptive text. The result can be shown from the tables and the diagrams in the previous chapter.
2. Factors that influence changes of the students' reading comprehension of Descriptive text are; the material, the technique, the media, the classroom management, the teacher's strategy and the teacher's approach.

Suggestion

1. The use of pictures and semantic mapping to comprehend the students' understanding could be a good alternative in teaching and learning English.
2. The researcher as an English teacher would prepare some activities dealing with the use of

50

pictures and semantic mapping to motivate the students in interaction and feed backs among the process.

3. The other researchers could apply the pictures and the semantic mapping on other skills in English, such as listening, speaking or writing and other genre texts such as procedure, narrative, report, etc.

Notes:

*This article is from the writer's thesis at graduate program State University of Padang for graduation period of March 2013 with Major Advisor Prof. Drs. H. Zainil, M.A and Co-Advisor Dr. Desmawati Radjab, M.Pd.

References

Brown, H. Douglas. 2001. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approaches to Language Paedagogy (*2nd Edition). New York: Longman.

Departemen Pendidikan Nasional. 2003. *Kurikulum 2004 Standar Kompetensi Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Menengah Pertama dan Madrasah Tsanawiyah.* Jakarta: Pusat Kurikulum Balitbang Depdiknas.

Estes, Thomas H. 1999. *Strategies for Reading to Learn: Semantic Maps.* Retrieved from http://www.readingquest.org/edis771/semantic_maps.html on March 20th, 2010.

Harmer, Jeremy. 1998. *How to Teach English.* New York: Pearson Education Ltd.

Hendrick, Joanne. 1994. *Total Learning: Developmental Curriculum for the Young Child 4th Ed.* New York: MacMillan College Publishing Company.

Horn, Bradley. 2008. 'Exploring New York City' *English Teaching Forum.* No. 1, p. 52 – 55.

Jensen, Eric. 1998. *Teaching with the Brain in Mind.* Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kemmis, Stephen and Robin McTaggart. 1988. *The Action Research Planner 3rd Ed.* Victoria: Deakin University Press.

Kemp, Jerrold E., Gary R. Morrison, and Steven M. Ross. 1994. *Designing Effective Instruction.* Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada

Kramsch, Claire. 1998. *Language and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Matthews, Peter. 1997. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marlowe, Bruce A. and Marilyn L. Page. 1998. *Creating and Sustaining the Constructivist Classroom.* California: Corwin Press, Inc.

McWhorter, Kathleen T. 1992. *Efficient and Flexible Reading 3rd Edition.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

Mikulecky, Beatrice S. 1990. *A Short Course in Teaching Reading Skills*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Moore, Kenneth D. 2005. *Effective Instructional Strategies from Theory to Practice.* London: Sage Publications.

Murawski, Wendy W. and Lisa A. Dieker. 2004. 'Tips and Strategies for Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level' *teaching Exceptional Children.* Vol. 36, No. 5, p. 52 – 58.

Pardiyono. 2007. *Pasti Bisa! Teaching Genre-Based Writing: Metode Mengajar Writing berbasis Genre secara Efektif.* Yogyakarta: Andi Yogyakarta.

Schwegler, Robert A. 2010. *Patterns of Exposition 9th Ed.* Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

Smaldinho, Sharon E., Deborah L. Lowther, and James D. Russel. 2007. *Instructional Technology and Media for Learning 9th edition.* New Jersey: Pearson Pentice Hall

Sudijono, Anas. 2006. *Pengantar Statistik Pendidikan.* Jakarta: PT. RajaGrafindo Persada

Yasin, Anas. 2010. *Penelitian Tindakan Kelas: Tuntunan Praktis.* Padang: Sukabina Press.

Wales, James . 2011. "Genre" *Wikipedia: the Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre, on January 12th , 2011 at 11.00

Wulyani, Anik Nunuk. 2007. 'Competency-Based Teaching and Learning at Senior High School' *Bahasa dan Seni*. Vol. 35, No. 2

Zaid, Mohammed Abdullah. 1995. "Semantic Mapping in Communicative Language Teaching". *Teaching English Forum,* July – September. Vo. 33, No. 3. Retrieved from http://eca.state.gov/forum/vols/vol33/no3/p6.html on May 10th, 2010