



## The Role of Home and Classroom Environments in Promoting the Students' EFL Literacy at an Elementary School in Bandung, Indonesia

Lilies Setiasih  
Bandung Islamic University  
lies\_hadi@yahoo.com

### Abstract

This article reports on a case study of the role of home and classroom environments in promoting the Indonesian students' EFL literacy at an elementary school in Bandung, Indonesia. This study was an attempt to fill the gap of a controversy among decision makers about the idea of offering English at elementary schools and the reality that at the school where the research was conducted, English was fully used as a means of instruction for three subject matters in the fourth grade: Mathematics, Science, and English. Considering that literacy is shaped in socio-cultural contexts, the researcher assumed that the students acquired and developed their English literacy at school and outside of school. Both home and classroom environments might contribute to the students' English literacy development. The purpose of the research was to describe the level of the students' English literacy and to identify the factors in both the home and classroom environments that played a role in promoting the students' English literacy.

**Key Words:** literacy, English literacy, parental involvement, classroom practice

### Introduction

Teaching English at the elementary school level in Indonesia is still controversial for several reasons (Abdul-Hamid, 2002; Alwasilah, 2001). A key reason is that English literacy is very difficult to accomplish for students in elementary schools. According to Wenden and Rubin (1987, p. 28), "learning a new language is a complex process that involves constructing knowledge of the language by employing cognitive, external, and internal processes." This nature of literacy becomes a more complex issue with regard to English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. However, at the school where the research was conducted, English was fully used as a means of instruction for English, Mathematics, and Science in the fourth grade and the books used for those subjects were those commonly used in Singapore wherein English functions as a second language (ESL). Where English was used as a means of instruction, English literacy skills became important for the students because they were learning tools to understand the three subjects. In other words, without having English literacy skills, the students would have difficulty in understanding the content of the subject matter.

With this in mind, the fourth graders were assumed to have the English literacy skills, especially reading and writing skills, needed to do academic English literacy practices. Considering that literacy is shaped in socio-cultural contexts, the students were also assumed to acquire and develop English literacy not only at school, but also outside of school because their English literacy practices were embedded in their daily lives. In this way, the students' home environment might contribute to their English literacy development. This issue lacked thorough investigation in the Indonesian context. Little is known about the studies investigating the external factors, such as what, how, and why students read and write in

English once they are out of school, what they gain from these activities, and what parents do to help their child's English outside the classroom. More practically, to support students' successful English achievement, researchers in Indonesia have conducted many kinds of research on the teaching of English at elementary schools, and these English studies have provided both theoretical and pedagogical insights about EFL students and their acquisition of English literacy. However, the focus of these studies has been on the teaching of English as a foreign language inside schools (e.g., Cahyono, 2003; Kusuma, 2011).

The lack of consensus among educational decision makers about offering English at elementary schools, coupled with the existence of an elementary school where teachers fully used English as a means of instruction, and the complexity of English literacy learning with the lack of the English literacy studies addressing students' home environment, culminated in a need to investigate the English literacy of the fourth grade students in this elementary school and the factors promoting their English literacy. In brief, the purposes of this study were to describe the level of the students' English literacy and to identify the factors in both the home and classroom environments that played a role in promoting the students' English literacy.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions below frame the purposes of this study in supporting English literacy:

- 1) What is the level of the fourth grade students' English literacy, based on the English Benchmark Assessments level 3?
- 2) How do the students' home environments support their English literacy development?
- 3) What classroom practices support the students' English (EFL) literacy?

The interviews with the students and their parents and classroom observations were conducted to identify the factors in the students' home environments and in the classroom that supported their English literacy skills. Before conducting the interviews and classroom observations, the level of the fourth grade students' English literacy as individual skills was investigated using English proficiency tests (presented on TEFLIN seminar, 2013). The use of the English proficiency tests verified that the students' English proficiency was sufficient to receive instruction in English in the three subject matters offered at the school.

### **Conceptual framework**

For purposes of this research, literacy is framed using several dimensions and theoretical approaches. First, literacy is defined as "the ability to read written texts and to write texts at a specified proficiency level" (Powell, 1999, p. 18), from cognitive and socio-cultural approaches. Based on the cognitive approach, literacy is seen as "cognitively encoding (writing) and decoding (reading) skills" (Gillen and Hall, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, literacy is viewed as autonomous, cognitive, and individual skills (Millard, 2003; Reyes, et al., 2009; Street, 1984) that can be measured by tests, and the results accurately reflect students' cognitive skills in literacy (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 2).

Based on the socio-cultural approach (e.g., Cole, 1981; John, 1997; Heath, 1983; Luke, 1994; Street, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978), literacy is viewed as socio-cultural practices that



are put to work in institutions; family, community, and school because meaning is a social negotiation that depends on supportive interactions and shared uses of language (Lipson and Wixson, 2003, p. 7). The researchers of this theory assume that interactions and participation in literacy activities are important because the participation is both the product and the process of learning (Zuengler and Miller, 2006).

Referring to the cognitive approach, the students' literacy is defined as cognitive skills reflecting the ability to read written texts and to write texts at a specified proficiency level. These literacy skills can be measured by tests and the results accurately reflect the students' cognitive skills in literacy. With this in mind, proficiency English tests specified for grade 3 (Ventriglia, 2005) were used to describe the fourth grade students' English literacy level. Meanwhile, referring to the socio-cultural approach, the students' literacy skills are theoretically shaped in social and cultural contexts because their literacy practices are embedded in their daily lives. Using this framing, the students' English literacy skills were assumed to be required and developed not only at school, but also at home. Therefore, the people surrounding the students were very important for creating the interactions and participation in English literacy events. To identify the factors that played a role in promoting their English literacy skills in these socio-cultural contexts, the interviews with the students and their parents and the observations in the classroom practices were conducted.

In this study, home environment context was defined very broadly; therefore, the scope of this study was limited to parental involvement activities, home English literacy-supportive facilities in terms of access to print materials and technology, and English literate demonstration or exposure at home (Rhodes, 1993, p. 148). Parental involvement activities are categorized as "direct and indirect parental involvement" (Eccles and Harold, 1996, p. 251; Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci, 1991, p. 508). Parental involvement is defined as the parents' reported behaviors of support for learning, focused on the parent's activities to provide support within the domain of learning, and participation in school-related activities (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 237; Grolnick et al., 1991, p. 508). In this study, a direct involvement activity includes helping their children at home with school assignments or school-related activities, providing support within a given domain, and monitoring the student's literacy progress. Indirect involvement activity means making direct contact with the school, such as parents' participation in activities at school and contacting the school about their child's progress.

Meanwhile, the aspects of classroom environment were limited to classroom practices as part of the instructional context (Lipson and Wixson, 2003, p. 117), comprising the actual approach, strategies, materials, activities, and tasks used by the teachers and students in the classroom (Richards, 1998, p. 29). In brief, the cognitive and social views of literacy became the underlying theories to frame this study.

## **Research method**

The research was conducted at an elementary school in Bandung in 2010. This school, which has its own standard for English, applies an approach to second language instruction in which English, Mathematics, and Science are taught in English. The participants, consisting of twenty students, their parents, and four teachers, were purposively selected. Purposeful sampling means that the researcher used her judgment to select the sample for a specific purpose (McMillan, 1992, p. 76). The reasons were: firstly, the twenty fourth grade students were all Indonesian native speakers. They were learners of English and needed English literacy skills to support good academic achievement because they had English instructions in

three subject matters and did all the tasks provided by their teachers in English. These students had to learn not only English (L2) but also *bahasa Indonesia* (L1), while opportunities to maintain or develop both literacies were not easy to come by. Secondly, parents were regarded as those who supported their children's English literacy in the home context. They were the first educators in their children's lives. Thirdly, the school included English as a local content in its curriculum and the four teachers were responsible for students' English literacy development in the classroom context. The English, Mathematics, and Science teachers started to speak English fully as the means of instruction in the fourth grade. In brief, the features of the school and the participants were relevant to the needs of the study.

This was an interpretative qualitative case study having the characteristics as follows: 1) answering "how" question (Yin, 1989, p. 13). In this case, the research question addresses how home and classroom environments promote the students' English literacy; 2) investigating process rather than outcome (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). By interviewing the students' parents, the researcher tried to trace back the process of the students' English learning; 3) observing the behavior in its natural setting (classroom) and collecting data through sustained contact with people in settings where subjects spent their time (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 2); 4) a small scale case (Emilia, 2008, p. 191). The single case consisted of the fourth grade students' English literacy at an elementary school; 5) employing multiple data collections involving multiple sources of information rich in context and analytic procedures to allow for in-depth study (Berg, 2004, p. 89; Cresswell, 2005, p. 439). The instruments used to collect data included tests, interviews, classroom observations, and documentary materials.

### **Data Collection Method**

This study employed four major sources of data including student assessments, classroom observations, interviews, and documentary materials. Likewise, the research used multiple methods for data analysis through triangulation to enhance the validity of the study (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 301). First, to determine the literacy level of the students, proficiency tests focused on reading and writing abilities were conducted (See Appendix A & B). Based on these proficiency assessments (Ventriglia, 2005, p. x), three aspects of reading were tested to measure students' reading ability: word analysis, systematic vocabulary development, and comprehension. Then, two aspects of writing were assessed to measure students' writing ability: writing application and language conventions. The tests were taken from English Benchmark Assessments Level 3, which provided a flexible, complete system for assessing student progress in English proficiency of the third grade in primary school level. The system is firmly based on "recognized standards developed by teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages" (Ventriglia, 2005, p. viii).

In this study, both face validity and construct validity were addressed. Based on face validity, the tests were valid because "on the face of them, the tests seemed to be the right test to measure reading and writing ability" (Hatch and Farhady, 1982, p. 252). Meanwhile, based on construct validity, the tests were also valid because the test performance could be described psychologically (Nation and Macalister, 2010, p. 118). Moreover, these tests adopted from English Benchmark Assessments Level 3 have been standardized (Ventriglia, 2005, p. viii). According to McKenna and Stahl (2009, p. 37), "a valid test is always reliable." The tests meet this proof because they are standardized proficiency tests (Ventriglia, 2005, p. viii). Therefore, the researcher concluded that the tests were valid and



reliable. However, to make sure of the reliability of the tests, the parallel test method was applied (Hatch and Farhady, 1982, p. 246). The scores of the test 1 and test 2 were correlated. Based on the statistical calculation, it was found that the reliability of reading test was 76.84 %, the reliability of writing test was 79.15%, and the reliability of the whole test was 89.93%. A reliability coefficient of  $> .70$  is considered high for this type of test (Hughes, 1989, p. 32). Therefore, these tests were proven to be reliable.

The researcher used interviews as the second method of collecting data. A semi-structured interview (See Appendix C &D) was employed with each of the research participants. The interview questions, adapted from “Literacy Assessment: A Handbook of Instruments” (Rhodes, 1993) and the bulletin reports on the Foundations of Literacy Study (Weigel and Martin, 2006), were adjusted to the objectives of the study. The interview questions were specifically intended to identify the nature of the student’s home English literacy environment focused on supporting facilities, the nature of the English literate demonstrations or exposure at home, the nature of the students’ engagement in English literacy at home, and the parental involvement activities in promoting the students’ English literacy. The interviewer worked with the participants to schedule an interview time that matched the participants’ convenience. Each of the interview sessions, which took approximately one hour, was recorded. After the interviews had been conducted, the researcher reviewed and transcribed all of the audio-tape recordings.

Third, the researcher used a non-participant classroom observation method (Cresswell, 1998, p. 150) that focused on the teacher-student activities and the factors supporting English literacy. The classroom observations, conducted for three months from February 2010 to May 2010, were intended to identify the factors considered to promote the students’ English literacy. The researcher video-recorded events in a systematic manner as they happened, then coded, and transcribed the events (Blaxter and Tight, 1996, p. 157). While observing the teacher-student activities in English, Math, and Science classes, the researcher took field notes. Fourth, the researcher used documentary materials such as teaching materials, lesson plans, and syllabus to enrich the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

## Data Analysis

The results of the proficiency tests were analyzed and interpreted using the system of English Benchmark Assessments Level 3. To simplify the analysis of the data obtained through the interviews, the results of the tests were grouped into high, middle, and low performers using quarter terms to show the standing of any particular score in a group of scores (Hatch and Farhady, 1982, p. 45).

The data from the interviews and observations were transcribed, coded, classified, and categorized. The salient characteristics, similarities and differences among the categories were noted, compared, analyzed, and interpreted descriptively. In this study, prolonged engagement, persistent observations, and triangulation were used to establish trustworthiness or internal validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 316) of the data. Meanwhile, the researcher detailed the explanation of the data in order to help readers understand the context. Likewise, the researcher used thick description to establish transferability (external validity) so that other readers interested in making a transfer and draw conclusions could do so. However, the transcriptions of the data findings cannot be completely presented in this paper as they were in the original report because of the article word and page limit requirements. Then, to establish confirmability and dependability as the external audit (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 316), the process and findings of the study were shared with experienced researchers who

examined the findings, interpretations, and conclusions to ensure they were supported by the data.

## Research findings and Discussion

### 1. Fourth Grade Students' English Literacy Levels

This section presents the answer to the first research question related to the fourth grade students' English literacy level, which is needed to know the standings of the students. The proficiency tests were administered twice. All raw scores in test 1 and test 2 were recorded and converted into performance levels based on the English Benchmark Assessments system Level 3. Then, the results were categorized into three levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. The percentage of the students' English proficiency levels as a whole is shown in the following table.

*Table 1 Percentage of Students' English Proficiency Levels*

| NO | LEVEL        | Reading Word Analysis |    | Reading Voc. Dev |    | Reading Comp. |    | Writing Application |    | Writing Lang. Convention |    |
|----|--------------|-----------------------|----|------------------|----|---------------|----|---------------------|----|--------------------------|----|
|    |              | T1                    | T2 | T1               | T2 | T1            | T2 | T1                  | T2 | T1                       | T2 |
| 1. | Beginning    | 20                    | 10 | 15               | 5  | 5             | -  | 15                  | 15 | 30                       | 5  |
| 3. | Intermediate | -                     | -  | 30               | 25 | 5             | 15 | 15                  | 25 | 30                       | -  |
| 5. | Advanced     | 80                    | 90 | 55               | 70 | 90            | 85 | 70                  | 60 | 40                       | 95 |

#### *Discussion of the Fourth Grade Students' English Literacy Level*

The table shows that  $\geq 60\%$  of the whole students are in the advanced level for almost all aspects of reading and writing skills in the test 1. However, the results of the test 2 show an improvement in the aspects of vocabulary development and writing convention. Therefore,  $\geq 60\%$  of the whole students are in the advanced level for all aspects of reading and writing skills in the test 2. The researcher tried to describe the students' English literacy levels based on those suggested by Wells (1987) because the criteria of the English Benchmark Assessment system were too long to describe in this paper. Based on Well's criteria, this study demonstrates that most students were already literate in English in the performative, functional, and information levels even though the degree of their proficiency was different. In the performative level, the majority of the students had the ability to decode simple written messages and encode ideas into writing according to written conventions in line with their grade. In the functional level, they had the ability to cope with the needs of everyday life that involve written language. In the information level, they had the ability to use literacy skills in the acquisition of knowledge. These results were supported by the data from both the interviews and classroom observations indicating that the students could read story books, send emails, understand cartoon movies, and make short daily conversation. In addition, they could read the school textbooks, do their homework, and understand the instruction of the three subject matters in English.

Then, based on the quarter terms, the results of proficiency tests were grouped into high, middle, and low performers. The results indicated four students (20%) were grouped as low performers, five students (25%) were grouped as high performers, and eleven students (55%) were grouped as mid-performers. These categories were used to facilitate the analysis



of the interview data. In short, the study shows that most students had adequate capacity of English literacy skills to have English as a means of instruction because they had fulfilled the criteria of advanced level based on the system of English Benchmark Assessments Level 3, used for grade 3 in the United States.

## **2. Home Environment Factors that contributed to the Students' English Literacy Development**

This section presents the answer to the second research question related to home environment. The scope of the home environment was limited to parental involvement activities, home English literacy-supporting facilities in terms of access to print materials and technology, and English literate demonstration or exposure at home (Rhodes, 1993, p.148). This study defines parental involvement as the parents' reported behaviors supportive of learning, focused on the parent's activities to provide support within the domain of learning, and participation in school-related activities (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 237; Grolnick, Ryan, and Deci, 1991, p. 508). Direct involvement activity includes helping their children at home with school assignments or school-related activities, providing support within a given domain, and monitoring their child's literacy progress.

The data obtained through the interviews with the students and parents were transcribed verbatim and summarized based on the students' levels of English literacy; high level performers, mid-level performers, and low level performers. A review of the findings yielded an overall picture of the students' home environment. Firstly, most students' parents interacted with their children through reading English books and audio-visual tools, offered socialization and direct instruction, helped children with their homework, monitored their learning, and created opportunities for English exposure. Some parents provided an opportunity to have an extra lesson from outside sources and participated in school activities. The difference among the students was in the frequency of the interactions.

Secondly, the parents used various strategies in supporting their children as follows: 1) reading books aloud or narrating them to draw their children's interest and to familiarize them with English sounds; 2) discussing the books together and asking the children questions about the content during or after reading; 3) utilizing reading in a playful way; 4) translating the stories into *bahasa Indonesia*; 5) accompanying them to watch movies or repeating movies, lines of dialogues and songs; 6) using English as a means of daily communication for some high performers; 7) reading them school-based books or modeling in reading, writing, and speaking English; and 8) monitoring. Thirdly, the parents provided their children with printed, online and other electronic resources, such as story books, comics, magazines, cartoon movies, computers, hand-phones, internet, music audio-tapes, and games. The difference among the students was in the number of the resources they had.

Fourthly, all high performers and some mid-performers had their own initiative to engage in English literacy activities such as writing emails, reading books, watching movies, playing games and doing their homework by themselves. Some mid-performers and all low performers were still helped by their parents do their homework. All low performers had extra lessons from their tutors. At last, based on the parents' perspectives, the interactions and their involvement activities enhanced their children's experience and knowledge, stimulated their interests, made them familiar to recognizing English sounds, words, expressions, and grammar, facilitated their adaptation to school demand, helped them finish their homework, and provided them considerable knowledge and vocabulary for the subjects at school. Reading of English books helped their children to facilitate English reading

comprehension at school and established good reading and study habits. However, the low performers' and some mid-performers' parents were still skeptical regarding any visible results of English reading done before, but they said that, at least, these activities facilitated their children's adaptation to study English at school and made them familiar with English.

### *2.1. Discussion of the Home Environment*

In analyzing the data, three main classifications were set up to reflect the home environment: 1) parent-child interactions (engagement), which were divided into four categories; parent-child interaction through reading English books: parent-child interaction through direct help consisting of direct instruction, helping children with their homework and monitoring, parent-child interaction through printed and audio-visual tools; and parent-child interaction through socialization and acculturation; 2) English literate demonstration or exposure at home, which was considered one category; and 3) other family supports in the forms of utilization of external and internal facilities. External facilities included having extra lessons from tutors. Internal facilities included the availability of literacy-related resources at home. Thus, seven categories to consider co-relationships among classifications were set up.

In analyzing data by category, the data among families were compared, and the similarities and differences were explored. Those categories, emerged from the transcripts, were identified in this study to be potential supports on the students' English literacy development. The analysis can be summarized as follows. First, the parents interacted with their children through various activities so the students were automatically encouraged to participate in those interactions. The student learning is dependent on social interaction that is heavily scaffolded, and on social organization of contexts that allows students to transform what they know into important academic knowledge and skills (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86). The interactions and participation in the activities mentioned above were both the product and the process of learning (Zuengler and Miller, 2006). Then, in line with Vygotsky's views (1978), it was within the flow of the students' experience of their participation in society that English language was internalized and understanding developed. The students' English literacy practices were embedded in their daily lives and the English language was internalized in their social interactions. This is in line with what other researchers (e.g., Brock, et al., 2009, p. 146; Heath, 1983; Street, 1984) believe that literacy practices at home greatly influence literacy acquisition and development in school. In brief, the study shows that early exposure to English, accompanied by parents' ongoing involvement and interaction, had a positive effect on student's English acquisition and literacy development.

Second, the high performers and some middle performers were active learners through practicing literacy activities by themselves. Piaget (1970, p. 28) argues that by taking the action to solve problems, learning occurs. In this case, the students learned English through their action in literacy events. Third, the students had input and exposure from various sources, such as parents, books, movies, magazines, internet, and tutors. The meaningful and comprehensible English input as exposure occurred in these social interactions with people and language providers surrounding the students. Krashen (1987, p. 24) states that one important area of consideration in L2 literacy acquisition is the influence of input on the L2 learners' development. Foreigners talk, parents talk, and teachers talk are all influential on students L2 learning. One assumption underlying social perspectives on reading and writing is that knowledge is constructed through the individual's interaction with the socio-cultural environment (Lipson and Wixson, 2003, p. 7). In brief, the study indicated that the students' English knowledge was constructed through the students' interaction with



the socio-cultural environment and reading and writing skills were acquired through assisted learning.

Third, by listening to music, playing games, watching movies, reading stories, and doing light writing, the students were engaged in purposeful action. In line with Kramsch's views (2004, p. 133), linguistic signs are created, used, borrowed, and interpreted by individuals engaged in purposeful action, and language emerges from socio-cultural activities. Robinson and Verluis, (1985) suggest that print-based and online literacies are mutually complementary. This idea is in line with the current research findings, in that the students experienced their co-involvement with the three different kinds of media of literacy; printed, online, and other electronic media. In fact, several literacy activities took place across those spaces. A prominent activity in these three contexts was reading. Although the students did not realize the educational value of their English literacy activities, according to Schultz and Fecho (2000), out-of-school literacy activities provided enhancement and support the work of the school. In brief, the study shows that the availability of print and electronic materials and the frequency of exposure through those tools indirectly supported the promotion of the students' English literacy.

Fourth, English exposure was received by the students from various sources such as parents, tutors, and electronic tools. Serpell, Baker, and Sonnenschein (2005, p. 6) argued that daily parent-child conversation could be helpful for literacy development. Thus this study demonstrates that English literacy demonstrations in the students' homes and opportunities for some students to learn English through outside sources contributed to their English literacy development. Finally, most parents only visited school when they were invited to attend teacher-parent conferences by the principal. The parents who often visited the school, made a contact with the school principal and teachers, and participated in school activities were those whose children were categorized as low performers. Thus, this study shows that the parents' participation in school activities didn't seem to provide a contribution to students' English literacy achievement, even though some empirical studies (e.g., Christenson, Rounds, and Gourney, 1992; Epstein, 1995) have shown evidence of positive effects of indirect parental involvement on school learning.

In conclusion, the home environment, comprising parental involvement activities, home English literacy-supporting facilities, and English literate demonstrations or exposure at home played an important role in promoting the students' English literacy development.

## *2.2 Salient Aspects Distinguishing the Students' English Literacy*

Based on the interviews with the students and their parents that are not detailed in this paper, the aspects distinguishing the students' English literacy development can be seen from student and family factors. The study shows that from the student factors, the differences of the students' investment of time, efforts, motivation, structured study time, and goal resulted in the difference of English literacy progress between the high and low performers. In fact, most students were busy for up to two hours after school with their school-based tasks almost every day. Most students enjoyed their pleasurable literacy activities only on their free days.

Meanwhile, from the parent factors, the differences of the strategy used by parents, the frequency of parents' engagement and exposure, and home learning facilities resulted in the difference of English literacy progress between the high and low performers. In fact, most families frequently relied on electronic tools such as watching cartoon movies, playing games, listening to music, and using internet for entertainment. The reason for the reliance on electronic tools was that most of the families had limited printed resources. However,

from the parents' perspective, the findings indicated that all parents agreed their efforts had a positive effect on their child's English.

### **3. Classroom Environment Factors that Contributed to the Students' English Literacy Development**

This section presents the findings to the third research question related to classroom environment. Three factors emerged from the transcripts reflected an overall picture of classroom environment at school, and were identified in this study to be potential supports for the students' English literacy development. Those factors were categorized as school English (EFL) program, English literate environment, and other supporting factors in classroom practices. Since English functions as a foreign language in Indonesia, the term EFL is used here. Firstly, school English program category included the goal, Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT), and class size. One of the goals of the school was the students' mastery of English as a foreign language. Therefore, to achieve this goal, the school applied CBLT, which was content-enriched. Three subject matters, comprising English, Mathematics, and Science, started instruction in English since the first year. Then, English was fully used as a means of instruction for those three subject matters in the fourth grade. It means that the teachers did not speak *bahasa Indonesia* if it was not necessary. Furthermore, each class only consisted of twenty students.

Secondly, English literate environment category reflected input, interactions, participations, reading and writing opportunities. The Science, Mathematics, and English teachers designed classroom practices by implementing various literacy activities that were contextual, comprehensible, meaningful and authentic to the students. The students that received English language input from the teachers, books, and movies, demonstrated meaningful and contextual events put in context, actively participated in the scientific demonstrations in Science and Mathematics, and asked questions in English. Twenty out of thirty seven teaching sessions were instructed in English a week. This means that about fifty four percent of the teaching sessions in the fourth grade were given in English. Ninety percent of the instruction of the three subject matters was delivered in English. The students were also engaged in many English literacy practices, such as worksheet, seatwork, English reading in the three subject matters, question and answer activities, and group work. As a result, the students had good access to not only general English texts but also content knowledge texts simultaneously. In addition, the teachers required them to read and write a lot from their textbooks and workbooks.

Thirdly, other supporting factors in classroom practices included teacher-student relationship, rewards, and literacy demand. The social relationship between teachers and students in and outside the classroom was very close and affective. The teachers were friendly and patient in listening to the students' complaints and difficulties. Furthermore, the three subject areas required demanding reading and writing assignments. Each night of the week, the students were assigned homework that was to be completed by the next day. The assignments included reading tasks and completing exercises on the workbook and homework book. Providing rewards to students having outstanding activities was also part of the system in this school. The rewards were in the forms of praise, points, and learning resources.



### *Discussion of Classroom Environment*

In analyzing the data, three categories were set up to reflect the classroom environment; school English (EFL) program, English literate environment, and other supporting factors in the classroom practices. The first category in the classroom environment was school English program type, reflecting the goal, CBLT, and class size. One of the goals of this school was students' mastery of English as a foreign language. According to Richards (2001, p. 113), the use of goals in teaching improves the effectiveness of teaching and learning because the goals will be the standard of the school which must be implemented by teachers. To achieve the school goal, the school applied CBLT and three subject areas had to be instructed in English. CBLT is the teaching method that "integrates content teaching with language teaching" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 204). An important educational goal in CBLT is to support language as a medium of learning to enable students to be academically successful (Mohan, 1990, p. 114).

Several studies show the improvement of L2 learning through CBLT. This school EFL program type has facilitated L2 learning at a level appropriate to students' age and grade in school, and the students not only become bilingual but also master the subject content of the regular elementary school curriculum that is taught through the second language (Curtain and Pesola, 1988, p. 71). Then, CBLT develops linguistic competence and functional literacy by exposing ESL learners to interdisciplinary input (Kasper, 2000, as cited in Lim, 2007, p. 62). Furthermore, in formal educational settings, second languages are best learned when the focus is on mastery of content rather than on mastery of language per se, and people learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in it (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 209). The small class in this school also facilitated the teachers to manage the students. Stern (1983, p. 270) states that the small classroom situation in the school is much more inclined to encourage co-operative behavior and to lack negative motivational characteristics of the competitive classroom in a large class. According to Brown (1994, p. 416), small classes provide diversity and students' interaction and they are small enough to give students plenty of opportunity to participate and to get individual attention. In brief, the current study shows that school goal, CBLT program, and class size facilitated the students' adaptation to English, interaction, and participation.

The second category in the classroom environment was English literate environment, reflecting input, interactions and participation, and reading and writing opportunities. First, the Science, Mathematics, and English teachers designed classroom practices by implementing various literacy activities that were contextual, comprehensible, meaningful and authentic. Turner and Kim (2005, p. 24) suggested that "teachers should design classroom environments that provide equal access to learning by implementing literacy activities that are meaningful and authentic to students and providing multiple opportunities for them to acquire and practice new skills." The investigated students also received a great amount of English exposure as input from teachers who used English as a means of instruction, books, and movies. One important area of consideration in L2 literacy acquisition is the influence of input on the L2 learners' development, and foreigners talk, parents talk, and teachers talk are all influential on students L2 learning (Krashen, 1987, p. 24). According to Musthafa (2010), exposure is one of the influential factors in language learning process. The massive amounts of input the students encounter at school are very influential and more exposure to the target language facilitates L2 literacy proficiency (Harmer, 2007a, p. 29; 2007b, p. 51; Mitchell and Myles, 1998). A

key influence on a child's successful appropriation of a skill is working with a more competent partner who can serve as a model by demonstrating necessary competencies, and the central characteristics of foreign language learning lie in "the amount and type of exposure to the language" (Cameron, 2001, p. 11; Krashen, 1987, p. 24). In this study, English language was not only as input received from more knowledgeable persons surrounding the students, but also as a resource for participation in the classroom literacy activities.

Furthermore, the students demonstrated meaningful events put in context (in English, Science and Mathematics practices), actively participated in the scientific demonstrations, read a lot of English texts, did exercises, asked questions in English, and were engaged in social practices by working in groups. All of these activities encouraged a student to interact with not only teachers, but also other students. Krashen (1987, p. 24) stated that "input should be meaningful and comprehensible because it is responsible for progress in language acquisition and output is possible as a result of acquired competence." In addition, Piaget argues that through taking action to solve a problem that learning occurs (Piaget, 1970a, p. 77). Learning cannot be separated from context (Cambourne, 2002, cited in McLaughlin and Devoogd, 2004, p. 21), and an activity is meaningful when it is put in context (Lemke, 1990, as cited in Lim, 2007, p. 62). The context means that it should be in "the context of real, purposeful language use" (Derewianka, 2004, p. 5). When students are presented with 'target language materials in a meaningful, contextualized form, with the primary focus on acquiring information, successful language learning occurs' (Wesche, 1989, p. 17, cited in Richards 2001, p. 209). Besides, children learn best when "learning is kept whole, meaningful, interesting, and functional" (Fisher, 1991, p. 3).

At last, the English teacher played video-movies to demonstrate the target language culture. This activity was also a means of socialization and acculturation of the target language in an authentic, meaningful context. As has been stated (Zuengler and Miller, 2006), the students' participation in the literacy events in the classroom and laboratories was the product and the process of learning. Therefore, the teachers surrounding the students played a significant role in assisting them to learn, bringing objects and ideas to their attention, talking while playing and asking questions. With the help of the teachers, they gradually acquired the English language. In brief, the current study shows that English literate environment, comprising input, students' interactions and participations, and reading and writing opportunities, played an important role in promoting the students' English literacy.

The third category was other factors considered to support the students' English literacy learning in the classroom practices. Those factors included teacher-student relationship, rewards, and literacy demand. First, teacher-student relationship in this grade provided facilitative support for the students' learning. Rapport is an important concept in creating positive energy in the classroom. It is the relationship or connection the teachers have with their students. In cases when "positive rapport is fostered, learning takes precedence" (Brown, 1994, p. 421). One theory that might address this idea is Self-determination Theory (Noels, 2011: <http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/>). It is argued that "the more the student experiences relatedness from the teacher or other significant people, the more likely they are to internalize, or take ownership of the activity. The more internalized the activity, the more engaged is the student, and the more likely they are to do well in the activity". Hughes and Kwok (2007), in Guthrie, Rueda, Gambrell, and Morrison (2009, p. 207), have shown that students who experienced a close, affirming

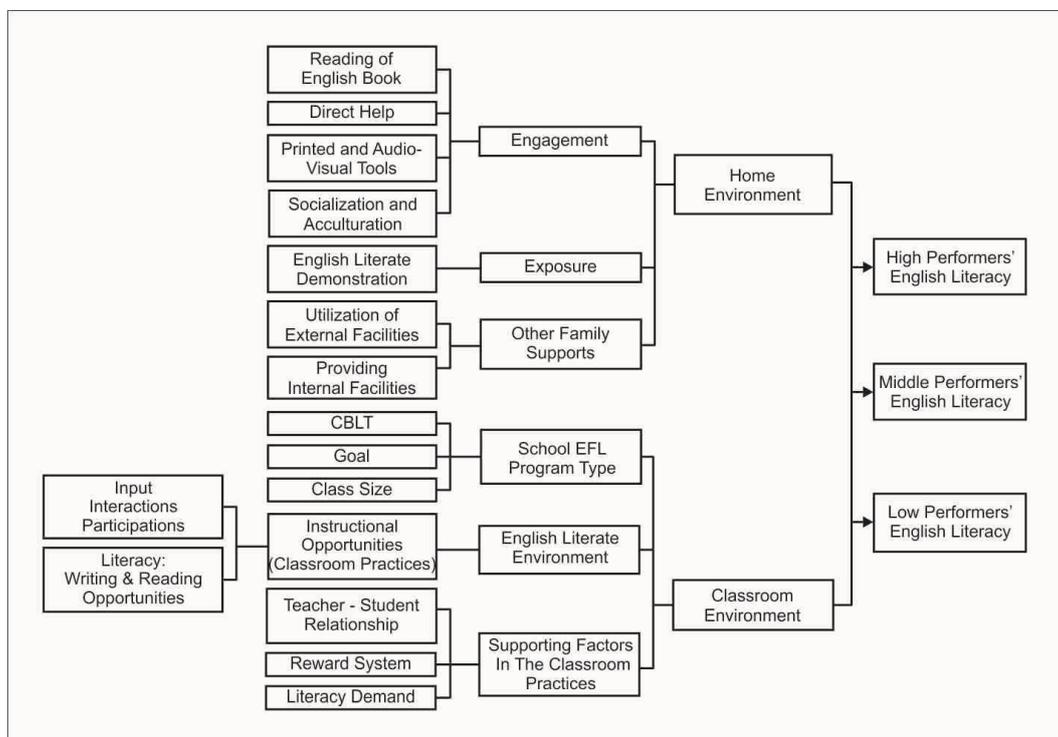


relationship with the teacher had greater participation and literacy activity than students who experienced a supportive but less positively affective relationship with the teacher. In brief, the present study demonstrated that teacher-student relationship provided facilitative support for the students' learning.

Second, the school and the teachers provided rewards to students having outstanding status, such as points and learning resources. These rewards increased the students' learning motivation. According to Alton-Lee, Nuthall, and Patrick (1993), cited in Hendry (1996), a reward is a motivator for some students and it doesn't necessarily need to be a lot, or happen all the time. However, students need to see that when they do their best or work together in a group work, they accomplish so much more. The present study indicated that the rewards offered by the school and teachers motivated most students to learn and do their homework. Third, the three subject areas required more demanding reading and writing assignments focused on reading the compulsory textbooks and doing structure and content exercises. To achieve the high level of reading competency in this grade, several years of efforts, attention, and continuing practice were required. Therefore, the students had to remain motivated and engaged in their reading tasks over time. Bergeson, Mayo, Lawson, and Miller's study (1998, p. 17) demonstrated that "reading requires motivation and continuing practice". This is in line with Brown (1994, p. 20) who states that successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner's own personal investment of time, efforts, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language. In brief, the literacy demand provided a contribution to the students' English literacy development.

In summary, the study shows that the school English program, classroom literate environment, teacher-students relationship, reward, and literacy demand provided a contribution to promote students' English literacy. The pattern of the factors that were found in the research and played a role in promoting the fourth grade students' English literacy is shown in the following figure.

Figure 1: Factors that Play a Role in Promoting Fourth Grade Students' English Literacy



### Conclusion and Implications

Theoretically, the results of the study cannot be generalized to different contexts and the transferability of its findings will be limited to those settings that have essential characteristics similar to the context of the study. However, the findings do provide contributions to teaching profession to young learners because they enrich the existing theories of literacy and the previous research findings addressing literacy development, parental involvement, and teaching English at the elementary school level. In addition, they provide preliminary results on which other researchers can further expand the investigation into this very complex and important issue. What the present researcher intends to emphasize in this case study is that the teaching English at an elementary school in the country in which English functions as a second language can be successful if home and school environments support the teaching-learning process. The study also shows that the fourth grade students' English literacy in this elementary school was in advanced level, assessed using English Benchmark Assessments Level 3 (Ventriglia, 2005) and this contributes to their ability to advance through English literacy instruction. In fact, their English literacy was supported by many factors, comprising the parental involvement activities, home-learning facilities, English program type, classroom literate environment and other English literacy-related factors. In conclusion, the home and classroom environments played an important role in promoting the students' English literacy. The students' literacy practices, both in and outside the school, were considered as their efforts to gain language input from and to interact with other more knowledgeable adults. Hence, the knowledge was actively built up from within by each student as a member of a community and by the community itself.



The findings of the study suggest the following pedagogical implications for people who work with, and for, language learners – elementary school learners in particular.

First, teachers should widen their understanding of English literacy, take advantage of knowledge that students bring from their home English literacy activities, and integrate them into their school-based literacy experiences in the classroom. By doing so, students can think positively about engaging in their English literacy activities and enriching their English literacy experience. Second, in this case, the students' English literacy achievement was not solely the result of English teaching because the Science and Mathematics teachers also played a role in promoting the students' English literacy. The activities conducted by the three subject teachers were complimentary. Therefore, CBLT is a good method to try to employ at schools. Third, there is a need to consider educational, meaningful, pleasurable out-of-school English literacy activities for Indonesian students beyond school-based tasks, which can improve their English literacy experiences, especially for those at elementary schools because the two are mutually supportive of English literacy. Schools and teachers should also consider more critically better English literacy resources for the students to read and write for pleasure at home. Fourth, referring to the parental involvement activities, all of the participating parents actually realized the importance of English and their role in educating their children, and had a desire to help their children learn, but not all parents possessed the knowledge on how to do it. To help the families whose children have trouble learning English, schools could implement a family learning program as a solution to increase the quality of parental involvement. This program in which parents learned through their involvement in their children's learning and engagement in their literacy practices did make a positive impact (Webb 2007, p. v; Hannon, 2003, p. 100). Through participating in such a program, parents will develop a better understanding of their children's learning and become more confident in themselves as supporters of their children's English literacy education. Fifth, this study also implies the need for the school community to establish relationships with the students' family. Edwards, Paratore, and Roser (2009, p. 89) reported that "home-school partnerships based on exchanging information can help parents and teachers form positive and powerful relationships, and enable schools and families to see parent involvement as a shared responsibility."

In summary, English can be taught successfully at elementary schools in the Indonesian context as long as the students' environments support them. Hopefully, through these recommendations, parents and teachers can begin to create stronger connections between the home and school because parental involvement is a critical aspect of a child's education.

## References

- Abdul-Hamied, F. (2002). *TEFL in Indonesia: Policy and development*. Bandung: Indonesia University of Education.
- Alwasilah, A. C. (2001). *Language, culture, and education: A portrait of contemporary Indonesia*. Bandung: Bahasa & Seni Press.
- Berg, B. L. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bergeson, T., Mayo, C.L., Lawson, B., & Miller, J. A. (1998). *Research into practice: An overview of reading research for Washington State*. Washington: EDRS.
- Blaxter, L. C. H., & Tight, M. (1996). *How to research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brock, C.H., McMillon, G., Pennington, J., Townsend, D., & Lapp, D (2009). Academic English and African American vernacular English. In L. M. Morrow, R. Rueda, & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on literacy and diversity* (pp. 137-157). New York: Guilford Press.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents
- Cahyono, B.Y. (2003). Aida and her mainstream classroom. *Journal of TEFLIN*, 14(2), 1-14.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching language to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Christenson, S. L., Rounds, T., & Gourney, D. (1992). Family factors and student achievement: An avenue to increase students' success. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 7, 178-206.
- Cook-Gumperz, J. (Ed.). (1986). *The social construction of literacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage Publication.
- Creswell, J.W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, N J.: Pearson
- Curtain, H. A., & Pesola, C. A. (1988). *Languages and children-- making the match: Foreign language instruction in the elementary school*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Derewianka, B. (2004). *Exploring how texts work*. Sydney: Primary English Teaching Association.
- Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1996). Family involvement in children's and adolescent's schooling. In A. Booth, & J. F. Dunn (Eds.). *Family-school links: How do they affect educational outcomes?* NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Edwards, P. A., Paratore, J., & Roser, N. (2009). Family literacy: Recognizing cultural significance. In L. M. Morrow, R. Rueda, & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on literacy and diversity* (pp. 77-96). New York: Guilford Press.
- Emilia, E. (2008). *Menulis tesis dan disertasi*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Epstein, J. L. (1991). Effects on student achievement of teachers' practices of parent involvement. *Advances in Reading/Language Research*, 5, 261-276.
- Fisher, B. (1991). *Joyful learning*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Gillen, J., & Hall, N. (2003). The emergence of early childhood literacy. In N. Hall, J. Larson, & J. Marsh (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood literacy* (pp. 3-13). London: Sage Publication.
- Grolnick, W. S., & Slowiaczek, M. L. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: A multidimensional conceptualization and motivational model. *Child Development*, 65, 237-252.
- Grolnick, W. S., Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (1991). The inner resources for school achievement: Motivational mediators of children's perceptions of their parents. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83, 508-517.
- Guthrie, J. T., Rueda, R., Gambrell, L. B., & Morrison, D. A. (2009). Roles of engagement,



- valuing, and identification in reading development of students from diverse background. In L. M. Morrow, R. Rueda, & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on literacy and diversity* (pp. 195-215). New York: Guilford Press.
- Hannon, P. (2003). Family literacy programmes. In N. Hall, J. Larson, & J. Marsh (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood literacy* (pp. 99-110). London: Sage Publication.
- Harmer, J. (2007a). *The practice of English language teaching*. (4th ed). Hong Kong: Pearson-Longman.
- Harmer, J. (2007b). *How to teach writing*. Malaysia: Pearson Longman.
- Hatch, E., & Farhady, H. (1982). *Research design and statistics for applied linguistics*. London: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hendry, G.D. (1996). Constructivism and educational practice. *Australian Journal of Education*, 40(1), 19-45.
- Hughes, A. (1989). *Testing for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- John, A. M. (1997). *Text, role, and content: Developing academic literacies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2004). Social Discursive Constructions of Self in L2 Learning. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp.133-153). Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1987). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Kusuma, P.C. (2011, March). An analysis of task demands and supports in EYL classroom. *Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Foreign Language Learning and Teaching*, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Lim, M. (2007). *Exploring social practices in English classes: A qualitative investigation of classroom talk in a Korean Secondary School*. (Doctoral thesis, University of Adelaide, Australia). Retrieved March 20, 2011, from <http://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/46913>.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lipson, M. Y., & Wixson, K. K. (2003). *Assessment & instruction of reading and writing difficulty*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Luke, A. (1994). The social construction of literacy in the primary school. In Unsworth, L. (Ed.), *Literacy learning and teaching*. Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia.
- McKenna, M.C., & Stahl, K. A. D. (2009). *Assessment for reading instruction*. (2nd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
- McLaughlin, M., & DeVogd, G. L. (2004). *Critical literacy: Enhancing students' comprehension of text*. New York: Scholastic.
- McMillan, J. H. (1992). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (Rev. ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Millard, E. (2003). Gender and early childhood literacy. In Hall, N., Larson, J., & Marsh, J. (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood literacy* (pp. 22-33). London: Sage Publication.
- Mitchell, R., & Myles, F. (1998). *Second language learning theories*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Mohan, B.A. (1990). *Language and content*. Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Musthafa, B. (2010, November). Five pillars of teaching English to young learners in

- Indonesia. Paper presented on the 57<sup>th</sup> TEFLIN International Conference, 1-3 November 2010. Bandung: Indonesia University of Education.
- Nation, I.S.P., & Macalister, J. (2010). Language curriculum design. In *ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series*. New York: Routledge.
- Noels. (2011). *Self-determination theory*. Retrieved March 12, 2011, from <http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/>
- Piaget, J. (1970a). *Genetic epistemology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Piaget, J. (1970b). *Science of education and the psychology of the child*. N. Y.: Viking.
- Powell, R. (1999). *Literacy as moral imperative: Facing the challenges of a pluralistic society*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher.
- Reyes, I., et al. (2009). What do we know about the discourse patterns of diverse students in multiple settings. In L. M. Morrow, R. Rueda, & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook of research on literacy and diversity* (pp. 55-76). New York: Guilford Press.
- Rhodes, L. K. (1993). *Literacy assessment: A handbook of instruments*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.
- Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robinson, B., & Versluis, E. B. (1985). Electronic text: A choice medium for reading. In D. Chandler, & S. Marcus (Eds), *Computer and literacy* (pp. 26-40). Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Schultz, K., & Fecho, B. (2000). Society's child: Social context and writing development. *Educational Psychologist*, 35(1), 51-62.
- Serpell, R., Baker, L., & Sonnenschein, S. (2005). *Becoming literate in the city*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stern, H. H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B.V. (2001). *Literacy and development: Ethnographic perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, J. D., & Kim, Y. (2004). Learning about building literacy communities in multicultural and multilingual classrooms from effective elementary teachers. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 10(1), 21-41.
- Ventriglia, L. (2005). *English benchmark assessment*. Columbia: D'Vinni S.A.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Webb, J. M. (2007). *An assessment of the impact of family learning programs on parents' learning through their involvement in their children's learning* (Master thesis), Waterford Institute of Technology, Republic of Ireland.
- Weigel, D., & Martin, S. (2006). *The crucial role of parents in children's literacy and language development*. Nevada: Foundation of Literacy Study, University of Nevada.
- Wells, G. (1987). Apprenticeship in literacy. *Interchange*, 18(1-2), 109-123. Retrieved January 10, 2011, from [link-springer.com/article.10.1007%2F01807064#](http://link-springer.com/article.10.1007%2F01807064#)
- Wenden, A., & Rubin, J. (1987). *Learner strategies in language learning*. Cambridge, UK.: Prentice.
- Zuengler, J., & Miller, E. R. (2006). Cognitive and Socio-cultural Perspectives: Two Parallel SLA Worlds? *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 35-58.