CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In this introductory section, background of the study is provided along with a brief theoretical overview. In this chapter, research questions that the study aims to answer are proposed. Purpose of the study, scope of the study, and siginificance of the study to the educational fields are also included.

1.1.   Background of the Study

In recent years, the number of children that learn English as a second or foreign language has been growing considerably (Brewster, Ellis, Girard, 2003: 1; Alderson and Bachman in McKay, 2006). Introducing early English learning is caused by the "strong 'folk' belief" that "young children learn languages better and more easily than other children" (Brewster, Ellis, Girard, 2003: 1). By starting English language learning since early grade in primary school, the duration for English language learning will be longer. Theoretically, this longer period of learning will result in better English language acquisition since students will get much more English exposure. It is also believed that mastering English since early age will give more opportunities for children to gain economic, cultural or educational advantages (Brewster, Ellis, Girard, 2003: 1; Alderson and Bachman in McKay, 2006). It is important to master English, both speaking and writing skills because it is one of key factors that may lead academic success and socioeconomic success may follow after that (Verdugo and Flores, 2007: 184).

This growing trend puts pressure on the governments around the world to introduce early English learning (Pinter, 2006: 3). In some countries, English has not been introduced until secondary schools but in many countries, English has been included in the curriculum since primary school.

In Indonesia, English language teaching for elementary level has been held for about 10 years. The English teaching policy is based on Education and Culture Department policy No. 0487/4/1992 Chapter VIII concerning Local Content Curriculum which states that schools can add some subjects into their curriculum as long as the subjects are not against the

aim of national education. This policy is also strengthened by the decree of Ministry of Education and Culture Number 060/U/1993, 25 February 1993 concerning elementary curriculum (www.depdiknas.go.id) which enables English teaching and learning to be conducted since fourth grade. These policies have been responded positively (Suyanto, 2005). Elementary schools that have the capabilities to hold English subject programs and feel the urgent need of it, compete to hold English language teaching and learning programs. Since the issuance of the decrees, the number of district and city governments all over the country that offer English classes at the elementary school level, has increased (Musthafa, 2010: 120). In some schools, English subject is not given until the fourth grade but in some schools, English subject has been given since the first grade. English subject in elementary school is listed as a local content (*muatan lokal*) subject. At the beginning English subject has been positioned as an optional local content subject but along the way, in many provinces, now English subject has become an obligatory local content.

This growing trend of early English teaching and learning may lead to a great concern that is teachers may have to teach the young language learners (YLLs) and assess them without any special training both on teaching YLLs and assessing them (Hasselgreen, 2005: 340). It is a general knowledge that most teachers for YLLs are not equipped with adequate training or education background in teaching YLLs (Hasselgreen, 2005: 353) let alone adequate training or education in language assessment (Alderson and Bachman in McKay, 2006; Hasselgreen, 2005: 353).

These facts are shown by some surveys carried out in Norway, Taiwan, and Indonesia. The survey in Norway shows that 65% of English teachers in primary schools have no formal competence in it (Hasselgreen, 2005: 353). Same thing happens in Taiwan. From a questionnaire-based survey on 166 primary English teachers in Taiwan, only 46,27% of the respondents that have qualification specific to the English teaching and 41,25% of them do not have either a qualification specific to the English teaching or general primary teaching qualification (Wang, 2008). The case in Indonesia is no difference. Survey shows that 80% of teachers in 10 regions in Java and Sumatra are still not qualified in teaching English for YLLs (Suyanto, 2005). This is also supported by the research conducted by Chodidjah (in Suyanto, 2005) showing that in DKI Jakarta only 20% of English for YLLs teachers are

qualified. The results of the surveys raise an important issue that is whether those teachers who are considered unqualified are capable in assessing YLLs well.

Teacher factor is one of the most important roles in the success of any English teaching and learning (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 29; Pinter, 2006: 3; Nunan, 1998: 7; Lewis, 2002: 41). Teachers have an important role to create and manage the conditions in which students can learn effectively (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 29; Moon, 2000: 148). In order to know whether learning has run effectively, teachers conduct assessment. Assessment enables teachers to get feedback on their teaching and students to get feedback on their learning in order to develop further (Moon, 2000: 148). Assessment also functions as a tool to know whether learning is taking place, whether YLLs are developing and making progress, and to what extent teachers are achieving their teaching goals or intentions (Moon, 2000: 148). Assessment is an important aspect of teaching and learning (Lang and Evans, 2006: 132). It is inseparable from teaching and learning process (Pinter, 2006: 131). Assessment is a critical aspect in promoting "more powerful learning" (Marsh, 2008: 261) and recording students' performance (Lang and Evans, 2006: 161). Language assessment has the potential to ensure that English language learning students "are on course to becoming literate and able participants in English language classroom settings" (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996: 3). When conducted appropriately, assessment can appropriately identify students' ability, and help teachers and other related parties to monitor students' progress and design proper programs for the students. Assessment can help students to learn (Tomlinson, 2005: 39). Therefore, in term of assessment, teachers play a very important role. It is their role to interpret "assessment principles and frameworks" by making assessment decisions based on their knowledge of the teaching and learning process and their knowledge on YLLs (McKay, 2006: 5).

However, as the result of the lack of training both in teaching YLLs and language assessment, most English for YLLs teachers in many parts of the world use 'paper and pencil tests' as major tools of assessment (Rea-Dickins and Rixon, 1999 in Pinter, 2006: 132). Teachers conduct these kinds of test because they are relatively easy to conduct (Pinter, 2006: 132; Cameron, 2001: 218). Another reason why most young learner teachers prefer to choose paper and pencil tests is that they think their work is already overload without additional assessment tasks (Hills, 1999). Conducting assessment system that fit YLLs may demand

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"new skills, new knowledge, and possibly more time" (Hills, 1999). That is why eventhough most teachers do not believe in those kinds of tests, they still conduct them anyway.

Traditional assessment methods like paper and pencil tests can be problematic forYLLs (Pinter, 2006: 131). They are also generally inappropriate for YLLs (Notari-Syverson, Losardo and Lim, 2003: 41). The activities that YLLs do during teaching and learning process cover activities like singing songs, participating in stories, participating and games and those activities are not easy to assess objectively (Pinter, 2006: 133). Assessing those activities by using paper and pencil tests will only result in inaccurate assessment. By inaccurate it means that the tests will not be able to show that YLLs are learning and the progress they are making. Inappropriate assessment leads to "inaccurate identification", "inadequate monitoring of student progress", and eventually leads to bigger problem, that is "the long-term failure of instruction" (Cummins 1984 in O'Malley & Pierce, 1996: 3).

In order to avoid ineffective and inappropriate assessment for YLLs, teachers need to be have adequate knowledge of language assessment that fits the characteristics of YLLs. According to Hasselgreen (2005: 338-339), assessment procedures for YLLs should follow the following demands:

1. Tasks should be appealing to the age group, interesting and captivating, preferably with elements of game and fun.
2. Many types of assessment should be used, with the pupil's, the parents' and the teacher's perspectives involved.
3. Both the tasks and the forms of feedback should be designed so that the pupil's strengths (what he or she can do) are highlighted.
4. The pupil should, at least under some circumstances, be given support in carrying out the tasks.
5. The teacher should be given access to and support in understanding basic criteria and methods for assessing language ability.
6. The activities used in assessment should be good learning activities in themselves."

It is also a must that assessment to be conducted by people who are "adequately trained", and have adequate experience in using the assessment tools (Espinosa and Lopez, 2007: 25). However, as mentioned earlier, in reality, most teachers for YLLs in Indonesia are not equipped with English teaching skill let alone teaching and assessing YLLs skill

(Suyanto, 2005; Musthafa, 2010: 120). English for YLLs teachers are often teachers who are forced by the headmasters to teach English (Suyanto, 2005). Without adequate training and education background these teachers have to teach English for YLLs since very often, there is limited number of teachers (Suyanto, 2005). A research conducted by Suyanto shows that teachers for YLLs do carry assessment in their classes (Suyanto, 2005). The concern is, however, whether these teachers who do not sufficient training and education in both teaching English for YLLs and assesing YLLs will be able to conduct valid and fair assessment.

Based on the concern above, this study attempts to investigate real assessment practice in English for YLLs classrooms. This study attempts to investigate the purposes of assessment in English language teaching of young language learners (YLLs), assessment techniques used, and language skills assessed in elementary level in Indonesian context. The study does not attempt to capture the whole phenomenon of assessment practice in the whole year of English language teaching. It focuses on the phenomenon captured through 6 observations in each class and document analysis on the assessment process in 6 meetings.

1.2. Research Questions

The study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the purposes of assessment in English language teaching for YLLs?
2. What assessment tehcniques are used?
3. What language skills are assessed?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The study investigates how YLLs in a public primary school in Bandung, are assessed. In particular, the purpose of this study is addressed to:

1. Investigate the purposes of assessment in English language teaching of YLLs. The purposes of assessment are viewed from three points of view: the teachers' point of view, the relevant theories, and curriculum for English teaching for elementary level in Indonesia.

2. Investigate assessment tehcniques used in English for YLLs teaching and learning process. The assessment techniques data are taken from the observations and document

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analysis which then are viewed from the theories of assessment techniques for YLLs and curriculum for English teaching for elementary level in Indonesia.

3. Investigate language skills assessed in English for YLLs teaching and learning process. The language skill focus in the assessment are viewed from the theories of language skills assessment for YLLs and curriculum for English teaching for elementary level in Indonesia.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The study has significances for three aspects, namely theory development, the educational practice and the professional development of English education especially of the English for YLLs teaching in Indonesia. For the theory development, this study has the potential to enrich the literature of English for young learner teaching, especially of assessment of English for YLLs. For the educational practice, the study results in the portrait of YLLs' assessment which can be the foundation in making better policy concerning English for YLLs teaching eventhough the portrait captured here is only a small part of the whole English for YLLs teaching. Lastly, for the professional development of English education especially of the English for YLLs teaching, this study is expected to enhance teachers' performance in assessing YLLs.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The study investigates 5 classes in a public primary school in Bandung. The study investigates what the purposes of assessment in English language teaching for YLLs are, what assessment techniques are used, and what language skills are assessed in elementary level in Indonesian context. The study, however, does not attempt to capture the whole phenomenon of assessment practice in the whole year of English language teaching. It limits the scope of the study on the phenomenon captured through 6 observations on 6 meetings in each class, interviews on 5 English teachers and document analysis on the assessment process

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in 6 meetings. All the data found and and discussed is the representative of the assessment practice during that period of time only.

1.6.   Organization of the Thesis

The organization of this thesis is framed as follows. Chapter I consists of background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, and the organization of the thesis. Chapter II presents relevant literature concerning the theories that have given shape to this study particulary to do with Young Language Learners (YLLs), definition of assessment, assessment procedures for YLLs, purposes of assessment, different sorts of assessment for different reasons, assessment techniques, assessment of language skills, assessment standard based on Indonesian elementary curriculum and English competency standard for elementary level in Indonesia. Chapter III outlines the design and the research methodology. It includes research design, research site and participants, data collection techniques and data analysis techniques. Chapter IV discusses the findings and discussion of the study. Finally, this thesis is concluded with Chapter V which provides conclusions drawn from the discussion in Chapter IV as well as recommendations for further research.