

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses some aspects related to the background of the study. It provides research questions, purpose of the research, scope of the research, significance, clarification of key terms, and organization of the paper.

1.1. Background

In Indonesia, as the result of decentralization of education in 2001, English as a foreign language may be taught in elementary school. It means that every elementary school may include English to its curriculum depending on the schools' needs.

According to the national standards in Indonesia (Permen Depdiknas, 2006), English lesson in elementary school is aimed to develop students' oral communication competence, limitedly to accompany action in school context. Oral communication competence, or specifically called as speaking skill, which becomes the goal of English learning in elementary school is considered as an initial skill that leads learners to develop the other communication competences or skills (reading and writing).

In line with this, Linse (2005:27) states that “children need to say a word before they can read it, and they need to read a word before they can write it.” It means that speaking is the first step that needs to be learned by young English learners before they can read and write in English. Thus, based on the national

standards and Linse's statement, teaching English in elementary school needs to focus on oral communication.

However, it is assumed that developing speaking skill to young learners in Indonesia is not easy because of the status of English as a foreign language. It means "it is taught in schools, often widely, but it does not play an essential role in national or social life" (Broughton, 2003: 6). Thus, children learning English as a foreign language tend to consider English as a subject, not as a language for communication. They also tend to find that speaking English is meaningless since, as Bruner (1983 as cited in Bas and Beyhan, 2010: 365-366) said, "children experienced it as very separate from their real lives." Actually children can learn English as a foreign language for communication even though it is not used in their real life. They can be set in arranged situations in which the situations force them to communicate in English at least in the classroom.

An observation that I did in an elementary school in Northern Bandung, exactly at a Year 4 class, proved that the difficulty of developing speaking skill in that school. The school was developing English learning program to optimize the use of English in verbal context. However, English was still considered merely as a subject by the students so that the school needed to create situations in which English was needed to be spoken by the students.

Based on the observation, it was found that the students' initial speaking skill in that school was still lack. Most of the students did not respond or answer when the teacher greeted, asked, or instructed them in English. Whereas, according to the basic competence standard for 4 year students, they were

supposed to be able to answer or respond simple questions or instructions in English from the teacher. They were also supposed to be able to introduce themselves, do greeting, ask for help, etc. (see the basic competence standards in Appendix B).

It was assumed that there were some possibilities why they did not respond to the questions in English. First, the students perhaps were not familiar yet with the vocabulary used by the teacher so that they did not understand what the teacher said or asked. Second, they perhaps understood the questions or what the teacher said but they did not know how to respond to them. Third, they might understand and know how to respond, but they were not confident to say it.

Therefore, it can be said that the goal of learning English at the elementary school had not been achieved satisfactorily yet. According to the English teachers in the school, there are some obstacles encountered in teaching and learning English, especially in developing speaking skill. First, the unbalance between the time allotment and the learning goals of English lesson leads to the lack of exposure to the language learned and unoptimal achievement of English learning goal. Second, varieties of activities in teaching English tend to provide less meaningful and contextual environment to practice speaking English.

In teaching English to young learners, time allotment and the varieties of activities are important. As Pinter (2006) states that teaching language to young learners needs a lengthy process in which the young learners can have lots of exposures to the language learned. It is supported by Harmer (2002) stating that “students need constant exposure to language since it is a key component of

language acquisition.” Teaching English to young learners also needs a special method that is appropriate to their characteristics. The method needs to provide meaningful and contextual environment to practice speaking English. This is in line with Pinter (2006) who states that learners need much practice to be able to speak English fluently.

In the view of this, project based learning (PBL) is one of the methods recommended to be used. PBL refers to a method that allows “students to design, plan, and carry out an extended project that produces a publicly exhibited output such as a product, publication, or presentation” (Patton, 2012:13). PBL gives contextual and meaningful learning for the learners through the projects as their learning environment. Through PBL, the learners are engaged in purposeful communication to complete authentic activities (project-work), so that they have the opportunity to use language in a relatively natural context (Haines, 1989, as cited in Fragoulis, 2009) and participate in meaningful activities which require authentic language use (Fragoulis, 2009).

PBL is also a method that can create optimal environment to practice speaking English. It is basically an attempt to create new instructional practices that reflect the environment in which children live and learn (Ozdemir, 2006, as cited in Bas and Beyhan 2010), so that it can give optimal opportunity to improve students’ language skill (Levine, 2004, as cited in Fragoulis, 2009).

A study of PBL by Gaer (1998) to a population of Southeast Asian Lao, Hmong, Mien, and Lahu refugees who had been in their beginning-level ESOL (English for Speaker of Other Language) classes since their arrival in the United

States in the early 1980s showed that learners had much more opportunity to speak English in appropriate contexts. It is said that the refugees' children seemed to lose their original culture (Asian culture) so that the project was preserving their culture by telling it (in form of some Asian recipes and folktales) using English to their children. The study showed that project led them to be able to speak English with the benefit of clear context of learning which was telling some Asian recipes and folktales in English to the students' children.

Viewing the success of PBL implementation to Asian refugees in the United States by Gaer, this study tries to apply PBL in Indonesian context. Different from Gaer's study which focused on adult learners, this study is focused on young learners, specifically Year 4 of elementary school. The project given to the students is to give presentation and to do conversation in English about some tourism objects and public places in Bandung to some foreigners that are coming to their school celebration. On the basis of the theories, this study entitled "The Use of Project-Based Learning in Improving Students' Speaking Skill" is conducted to investigate the use of PBL in teaching speaking to elementary students and its effect in improving their speaking skill.

1.2. Research Questions

This study investigates the following questions:

1. Can Project-Based Learning improve the students' speaking skill?
2. What speaking aspects can be improved through PBL?

3. What speaking activities are used in PBL to improve the students' speaking skill?

1.3. Purpose of the Research

Based on the research questions, the purposes of the study are as the following:

1. To investigate whether PBL improves the students' speaking skill or not.
2. To investigate what aspects of speaking are improved through PBL.
3. To explain speaking activities used in PBL to improve the students' speaking skill.

1.4. Scope of the Research

This study was conducted at a Year 4 class in one of the elementary schools in Northern Bandung. The concern of this study is the improvement of speaking skill that was indicated by the improvement of its five aspects (pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) through speaking activities that are used in PBL.

1.5. Significance of the Research

This study is expected to give significance to the development of teaching and learning EFL in Indonesia. Hopefully this study can also enrich the literature on teaching speaking to young learners and be a reference for those who want to conduct research with similar topic. Practically, the research is expected to help

English teachers to provide some appropriate strategies to improve students' speaking skill.

1.6. Clarification of Key Terms

1. Project-Based Learning: a learning method in which in the end of the lesson students have specific goal or product based on authentic problem in form of a show, presentation, etc. It is the chosen method to stimulate students to speak English.
2. Elementary students: Students from 7-12 years old (Slattery and Willis, 2001) who are learning in elementary school and chosen as participants of this study. The focus of the study is the fourth grader (8-10 years old) at an elementary school in Bandung.
3. Speaking skill: young learners' ability to speak English involving comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. It is the skill that becomes concern of this study.
4. Speaking Activity: activities conducted in the classroom to teach speaking. The activities are aimed to give the students model of speaking and to give them chances to practice their speaking.

1.7. Organization of the Paper

The study is organized as the following organization:

Chapter I: Introduction

This chapter presents general description of the paper entitled *The Use of Project-Based Learning in Improving Students' Speaking Skill*, consisting of the background of the research, research questions, research purpose, research scope, research significance, clarification of key terms, and the organization of the paper.

Chapter II: Theoretical Foundation

This chapter presents theoretical foundations about young learner's characteristics, speaking skill, speaking activities, teaching speaking to young learner, Project-Based Learning, and teaching speaking using PBL.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

This chapter describes research methodology that is applied investigating the study. It consists of research design, research site and participant, research procedure, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter IV: Findings and Discussion

This chapter provides and discusses the result of the research findings about the use PBL in improving students' speaking skill. It also presents the writer's interpretation towards the findings of the study.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Suggestions

This chapter draws conclusion from the findings and offers some suggestions regarding the use of Project-based learning in improving students' speaking skill for the students, teachers, and further research.