

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an introduction of the thesis that covers a background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, and the scope of the study. In addition, the significance of the study and the clarification of terms are also explained at the end of this chapter.

1.1 Background of the study

Teaching and assessing young learners are inseparable parts in the teaching and learning process. The teachers should have the knowledge how to teach and assess young learners since assessment often plays a prominent role in the teaching and learning process, and it is used by teachers to provide information of students' progress and achievement. It can help teachers in identifying the next steps in the learning process. It can also give the advantage for students to know how well they have achieved the purposes of teaching and learning. Brown (2001, p.16) argues that "assessment is an integral part of the teaching learning cycle". He believes that assessment and teaching are partners in the learning process. However, assessing young learners is a difficult part in teaching and learning process since they are in the period of when physical, motor, and linguistic development outpace growth rates at all other stages (Shepard, et.al, 1998).

Moreover, classroom language assessment for young learners today is likely to satisfy teachers or school purposes only, making them implement unsuitable language assessment for young learners. Thus, the assessment is not on target. The teachers need to have a great sensitivity in deciding the best or appropriate assessment for young learners. An example of inappropriate assessment for young learners is the use of paper and pencil tests. Rea- Dickins and Rixon (1999) and Pinter (2006) claimed that most English teachers for young learners in many parts of the world use paper and pencil tests as major tools of assessment, as these types of tests are relatively easy to conduct (Pinter, 2006, Cameron,

2001). Another reason why most young learners' teachers prefer to choose pencil and paper tests is that they think their work is already overloaded without additional assessment tasks (Hills, 1999). Conducting assessment system that fit to young learners may demand new skills, new knowledge, and possibly more time (Hills, 1999).

Using pencil and paper test as the sole tool to assess young learners is inappropriate with the basic principle of teaching young learners. Based on young learners' characteristics, they learn through songs, games, or chants (Harmer, 2001). Thus it is inappropriate to assess them with pencil and paper test models, because the tests will not be able to show the English for young learners are learning and the progress that they are making. As Hughes (2003, p.89) says that "Assessment would be the way of the same type of activities that the learners are involved in the L2 class".

In the Indonesian context, a similar problem of young learners' teachers having difficulties in assessing their students is also encountered. Different from the trend of teaching English to young learners globally where there is a marked increase in the teaching of English at the primary level (Rixon, 1999). Since the Indonesian National Curriculum 2013 of primary school in Indonesia does not include English as a compulsory subject No. 0487/4/2013 (*permendikbud*), rather, it is up to the school's policy to include the English subject as a local content or an extracurricular activity. The teaching of English to young learners varies from one school to another.

The reasoning behind this policy is that English language teaching in the early years of primary school is frequently unsuccessful for a number of reasons: there is a severe shortage of qualified proficient English teachers, English plays little or no role in the children's lives outside the school, and there are no appropriate learning materials (Martin, 2010). However, the biggest argument against teaching English at a primary level is that it might hinder children from acquiring their own local language (Coleman, 2010). However, it is also worth noting that for children to learn English at elementary school due to the critical period hypothesis that the earlier they start to learn a language, the more successful

they will be in language learning (McKay, 2006; Pinter, 2006). As Marinova-Todd et al (2000) argue that this belief is supported by studies that show the age influences learning because it is associated with social, psychological, educational, and other factors that can affect L2 proficiency. It means that children not only have to learn the content of the subject that was being taught in the classroom, but also need to acquire that language as their second language.

An additional issue arising with the implementation of the Indonesian Curriculum 2013 is that young learners' teachers' competence vary greatly from school to school. As reported by Suyanto (2004), most English teachers at elementary schools lack the competence to teach English to young learners. Similar findings emerged from research conducted by Suharno (2005) and Chodijah (2004), revealing that only few teachers comprehend the principles of teaching English to young learners. The lack of competence in teaching young learners would create many problems. Firstly, since English is considered as a foreign language in Indonesia, classrooms could be the only place where learners can internalize what they have learned. Hence, teachers with low contributions at their worst, contribute negatively to the success of language learning. The second problem may relate to assessing the learners' ability in using English.

In order to avoid ineffective and inappropriate assessment of English for young learners, it is also a must that the assessment to be conducted by people who are adequately trained and have adequate experience in using the assessment tools (Espinosa and Lopez, 2007). However, as mentioned earlier, in reality most teachers of English for young learners in Indonesia are not equipped with the skills of English teaching and assessing young learners (Musthafa, 2010, Suyanto, 2004). Research conducted by Suyanto (2004) shows that teachers for young language learners do carry assessment in their classes. The concern is that teachers often find it challenging to implement them due to the lack of clear guidelines or sufficient training

Based on the facts above, the researcher is interested in investigating teachers' assessment practices in English for young learners' classroom. This study wants to explore more about how classroom assessment practices are conducted by the EYL teachers. Hopefully findings of this study will provide an insight for teachers in applying appropriate assessment of English for young learners. It is also expected that this study will give useful information about how to assess young learners in teaching and learning process.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the explanation above, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the techniques that teachers use to assess English for young learners?
2. What language skills do teachers assess?
3. What difficulties are encountered by teachers during the assessment process?

1.3 Purposes of the study

Based on the research questions above, the purposes of this study are to investigate the practices of teachers in designing classroom assessment of English for Young Learners.

1. To identify techniques employed by teachers in assessing English for young learners.
2. To investigate the language skills assessed in English for young learners.
3. To identify difficulties encountered by teachers during the assessment process

1.4 The scope of the study

This study has some limitations and cannot be generalized into other situations. This study was conducted to investigate English for young learners' teachers' assessment in classroom practices.

1.5 Significance of the study

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of the theory and to enrich the literature on assessment literacy, especially the ability, the quality, and the steps in designing classroom assessments. In addition, for teachers, the study is expected to give contributions to English for young learner teacher's ability, especially for those who teach in elementary schools, specifically in designing classroom assessment.

1.6 Clarification of terms

To avoid misunderstanding, it is necessary to clarify the key terms frequently used in this research.

1. Assessment is defined as any methods used by the teachers in testing students' understanding and mastery of current knowledge. In this research, it is related to how the teachers provide information of students' progress and achievements.
2. The meaning of classroom assessment practices in this study refers to the activities from constructing paper pencil tests and measuring performance to grading, interpreting standardized test scores, and using assessment results in decision making in classroom.
3. In this study, the researcher defines young learners as unique person, therefore they need to be praised and encouraged.

